

took place in the Villa Wahnfried in Bayreuth in the early afternoon. Was it the exertions of the previous years, was it the natural fatigue after the table, Hitler, who was wearing civilian clothes, seemed to me to be very tired. His eyes were noticeably swollen, the ridges above his brows very puffy. His body had increased in fullness compared to before, albeit hardly noticeably. His fingers were more nervous. He did not observe himself tugging at his teeth with them several times during the conversation.

After general remarks about France, which essentially contained the ideas of his letter to Daladier sent a few days later, the Führer came to talk about my expulsion and had details of it presented to him. He approved in principle my plan to bring an action before a French tribunal against Henri de Kerilis, the main perpetrator of the smear campaign unleashed against me, after asking me whether I had really never committed any of the offenses charged against me by my enemies. "Such things as espionage" - and an embarrassed blush crossed his face at these words - "unfortunately exist. They're not nice, but we can't avoid them either. If you had ever come into contact with such things, you would have a hard time in court with the current hatred of Germans in Paris, and I could not give you permission for the planned trial. - I must confess that I was taken in by the Führer's shamefaced blush when he broached this question.

Hitler asked me whether I was not afraid that the French judiciary might produce forged documents and present false witnesses for the prosecution. When I answered this question in the negative, he gave his consent to the trial in Paris.

I do not know whether my petition, drafted with Professor Grimm's support, reached Justice Minister Marchandreau and what effect it would have had without the outbreak of war. Hitler had not lost sight of the matter. On the morning of September 3, Ribbentrop called me to the Reich Chancellery, where he was waiting for the Führer. The blue of a cloudless sky shone through the wide-open high windows of the anteroom, the sun-drenched crowns of the old oaks of the Tiergarten rustled. The weather was of that indescribable beauty and stillness with which nature loves to show itself to people at the onset of great catastrophes. The doors of the Führer's room opened softly. Ambassador Coulondre stepped out. He held his arm over the folder containing the French declaration of war and walked with short steps towards the exit. A few seconds later the Führer crossed the threshold. As chance would have it, his first glance fell on me. "You won't be able to go to Paris now," he said with an absent face. Then he turned to the ministers and generals who had gathered in the anteroom and invited them into his room for a briefing.

The unpopular war

In his memoirs, Winston Churchill recounts how he once talked to Roosevelt about the appropriate name for the new world war. He suggested to the American president that he call it "The war that was not inevitable".

That the war could have been avoided will not be disputed by Churchill. On the question of how the war could have been avoided, however, many views are likely to differ greatly from those of the British statesman.

For Germany and France, the conflict that broke out on September 3, 1939 was in any case the "most unpopular war" in their history. Neither in Paris nor in Berlin was there any trace of the chauvinistic enthusiasm which had accompanied the outbreak of the wars of 1914 and 1870 and which had also appeared in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. Herder's beautiful saying that "it is not the fatherlands but the states that wage wars with each other" proved to be true only rarely.

Certainly, both armies dutifully entered the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line, and in the small skirmishes that Gamelin fought to encourage the Poles in the run-up to Saarbrücken, the French troops did not lack bravura. But even in France, the heart was not in the right place.

The German people had believed until the last moment that Hitler would succeed in resolving the Danzig and Corridor issues peacefully. If the non-aggression pact with Soviet Russia had generally been received favorably, it was on the assumption that it had brought them closer to peace rather than war.

But that the Reich had the right on its side with its demands for revision against Poland was the sacred conviction of all Germans. If it had come to an armed conflict over the Anschluss, the Sudeten question or even Prague, public opinion in Germany would have been divided and the population would have been dominated by the feeling that it had become the victim of hasty and uninformed politicians. The Danzig and Corridor Statute, on the other hand, was perceived as such a crying injustice long before Hitler came to power, and the situation that had been gladly enveloped by Versailles on the German-Polish border since 1919 was seen as so unnatural and untenable that every German felt it was like a cut through his own body, and that no banning seemed like an act of justice itself. When it was then

This issue nevertheless led to war, the German people stood behind their government like one man.

While I spent the western campaign in Berlin and did not see Hitler in person until several weeks after the armistice at Compiègne, it was by chance that I witnessed almost the entire Polish campaign at the Führer's headquarters. On the evening of the French declaration of war, the Reich Foreign Minister had asked me to a meeting at the Foreign Office, but Hitler had suddenly ordered me to headquarters. It was one of his peculiarities that in such cases he did not refuse visitors who had made reservations, but invited them to accompany him on his travels. So it happened that from one hour to the next I was no longer in the anteroom of Wilhelmstrasse, but in a sleeping car compartment provided for me on the special train of the Reich Foreign Minister, which left the Silesian station for the Polish front.

At that time, the Reich Foreign Minister did not yet have separate field quarters; the

Mitropa carriages of his special train were attached to the Führer's headquarters train. This gave me the daily opportunity to observe Hitler at close quarters in his "field tent on wheels". He regularly drove or flew to the front. When he spent the day at headquarters, he usually took a few steps around midday in the vicinity of the railroad area that served as his base. To protect him from unwelcome visitors, the area was always surrounded by strange spirals of barbed wire in which, according to the technicians' reports, unwary pedestrians were bound to get caught. Hitler's personal security service was no small concern that their high-ranking protégé might come too close to the barrier and get caught in one of these wire spirals himself. With the beginning of the war, the Führer had exchanged the brown uniform coat of the party for a field gray one, on which, however, no military insignia were attached. Even during the short few steps around the platoon, Hitler never walked bareheaded, but wore a plate cap adapted to the cut of the Wehrmacht with a shield that protruded too far, which looked bad on him. For trips and flights to the front he usually dressed in a heavy leather coat.

My sleeping compartment was next to that of Ribbentrop's first adjutant. One night I was awakened by a lengthy long-distance telephone call that was being picked up in the neighboring compartment. The other compartments were also lively: the Foreign Office had passed on the message from the German Embassy in Moscow that the Red Army had set out on its march. After a brief discussion with his personal staff, the Reich Foreign Minister thought it advisable to disturb the Führer's sacrosanct sleep in order to inform him of this not unexpected, but nevertheless historic event.

The next day, Hitler spoke at the lunch table about the consequences of the Russian move and some individual strategic issues arising from it. The leaders of a German unit had crossed the demarcation line agreed with Moscow.

had already been exceeded. The division commander in charge had reported that an order to retreat to his troops, who were in the middle of their advance, would be detrimental to morale and prestige. "Prestige, prestige," remarked Hitler, "what nonsense has been done with this in 1914-1918. How many tens of thousands of German and French soldiers had to bleed to death needlessly just because it pleased the ambition of some general to hold or recapture a ridiculous ridge, the possession of which was of no military importance to one belligerent or the other." He ordered that the retreat to the demarcation line be carried out immediately in the section of the front in question. When, after the conclusion of the Polish campaign on the Heia peninsula, a last pocket of resistance refused to surrender and foreign propaganda made a big fuss about it, Hitler took no other position. "I don't know the term prestige", he explained to his military advisors and asked them about the presumed level of losses from an infantry assault on the Polish position. When he was told that he could expect around ten casualties in terms of dead and wounded, he forbade the attack and ordered them to wait until the enemy surrendered of their own accord. Was it the same man who, a few years later in Russia and Libya, in Italy, in Normandy and finally in Germany itself, gave the order to hold positions that had long since become untenable "to the last man", thereby wasting valuable German soldiers' blood in operations that had become strategically pointless?

As a civilian and guest of the Reich Foreign Minister, I naturally had no insight into the work of the military staff at headquarters. As far as I could judge as an outsider, however, the strategic leadership of the Polish campaign was still very much the responsibility of the General Staff. A small, in itself insignificant incident, however, showed me the problems

that Hitler's intuitive interventions had to pose for military experts accustomed to sober, objective work. One evening the Führer had gone to bed before midnight, contrary to his custom. Around the first hour of the morning, Hitler suddenly returned from his sleeping compartment with a somnambulistic expression on his face and demanded a map of a particular section of the front near the Carpathians. When he could not find the details he was looking for on it, he gave an exact description of the position of an advanced German unit from the top of his head. He ordered them to withdraw immediately, as they were about to be attacked by superior Polish forces.

When Hitler returned to his sleeping compartment, the officers looked at each other in amazement and disbelief. It was a completely remote sector of the front about which no special reports had been received for days and about which no one had personally reported to the Führer's headquarters. However, in accordance with orders, the officers issued Hitler's order that very night. Around noon, the division reported that the small advanced German unit had escaped a large Polish encirclement maneuver at the last minute by retreating.

In addition to his intuitive abilities, which were undoubtedly still extremely well developed at that time, Hitler also had an astonishing mnemonic talent. One afternoon, I joined the Führer's motorcade on a trip to Gdingen, which had been renamed "Gotenhafen". The harbor entrance was blocked by a ship that the Poles had sunk there at the beginning of the war. Part of the hull was still protruding above the water, so that the ship's name could be deciphered. He said nothing to the accompanying naval officers, but Hitler explained offhand that it was an old warship which Poland had acquired from Sweden and the latter from Russia. The ship had been used in the Russo-Japanese War and had suffered severe damage at Tsushima. To the astonishment of the naval experts, the Führer then spoke about this naval battle, listed all the Russian and Japanese units involved in it by name, including the strength of their crews and equipment, and went into detail about Admiral Togo's operational thoughts and the strategic mistakes of his great opponent Rostjstwenski. Hitler's remarks were improvised, as he had not foreseen the occasion that triggered them and had not been able to prepare for them. All his statements were confirmed when they were subsequently checked by the naval officers in specialized workshops.

People close to Hitler told me that he often spent whole nights reading books with incredible speed, without missing a single detail of their content. During the Polish campaign, the two-volume Apology of Genghis-Khan and his Eurasian Empire, which an English historian had recently published, lay in his sleeping compartment. It might sometimes be advisable to monitor the reading of dictators, especially if they have an unusual mnemonic talent.

I also witnessed the days of the siege and capture of Warsaw at the Führer's headquarters. The German parliamentarian who was supposed to demand the surrender of the Polish capital was kept blindfolded for a whole day and finally sent back without having achieved anything. As the man in question was an envoy by profession, his military comrades teased him with the title "Returning Envoy". The Polish commander also made no mention of the German suggestion to at least evacuate the civilian population to the Praha district on the other bank of the Vistula. Only the foreign colony, which had heard the German offer on the radio, managed to withdraw from the city, which had been declared a fortress. They were allowed to cross the lines at a certain point and at a certain hour. Despite the state of war with France, the French nationals were not interned, but the

Reich government left them free to travel to their homeland via Denmark. The stance taken by the Warsaw commander on the question of the surrender of the city can be admired and criticized in equal measure. From the point of view of international law, it deserves to be noted that that it was not an "open city" that was bombarded with German shells and bombs after his decision.

During the last days of the Polish campaign, the Führer's headquarters were stationed in the seaside resort of Sopot in Gdansk. The streets of Gdansk were filled with excited crowds until late at night. The soldiers from the Reich, who were staying within the walls of the old Hanseatic city, were showered with flowers and received a never-ending ovation.

The only unhappy faces I saw in the territory of the former Free State were the waiters in the Sopot spa hotel, who were used to a rich international clientele. They showed grumpy expressions when they had to serve the simple field food, which mostly consisted of stew, in the luxurious dining room. Only at the guide's table did I see bowls of fruit alongside flowers.

In Sopot I also had the opportunity to get to know the thought processes that preceded Hitler's foreign policy statements in the Danzig speech of October 5. Should he offer peace to the Western powers once again? "Paris and London will interpret it as weakness," he said over a meal, "they have no idea how strong I am. I can break through the Maginot Line when and where I want."

The Führer's ceremonial entry into Gdansk began in the morning hours of October 5 in Sopot. The suburbs and inner districts of the Hanseatic city, so rich in historical buildings, swam in a sea of flags and flowers, and the enthusiasm of the masses knew no bounds when Hitler's motorcade turned into the wide main street, where the symbol of Gdansk's freedom, the Artus Court, stands. In the Gothic ceremonial hall of this historic building, the Führer then performed the act of state of Gdansk's return to the Reich. The room, relatively small for the importance of the rally, with its beams darkened by age and the muted colors of its pillars and paintings, banners and guild signs, offered a strange contrast to the brand-new fabrics of the brown shirts and red swastika flags. Not far from Hitler's lectern, a larger-than-life figure from I don't know which legend loomed on the wall: a man's body in old-fashioned hunting clothes, crowned by a stag's head instead of a human one. The impassive expression of this sculpture had something ghostly about it in this hour of enthusiasm.

The following day I traveled back to Berlin with the Reich Foreign Minister and the members of his staff. When I asked Ribbentrop after my arrival in the Reich capital to rescind my U.K. position, he asked me what I, who had never had the slightest military training, wanted with "ten soldiers. He put me in charge of his office and put me in charge of a "France Committee", which was to coordinate the various civilian and military departments involved in French-language propaganda according to my guidelines. This France Committee met twice a week to discuss publications, leaflets and other propaganda initiatives. Part of the submitted

Drafts were printed, but the Luftwaffe showed little inclination to use pilots and airplanes for their distribution in France. I am only aware of numbers of a replica of the "Paris-Soir", published under the direction of the France Committee as "Paris-Noir", being dropped over the French capital. The straps were so loosely attached that they came loose in the air after being dropped. However, this patent failed on one pack of the "Paris-Noir" and it knocked

over a passer-by on the street on its arrival on earth. When the unfortunate man recovered from his stupor and, out of understandable curiosity, untied the packet himself, he was arrested by a passing police patrol as a distributor of illegal printed matter. His indignation that he should be innocently punished after the horror he had endured was so convincing that he was soon set free again.

At the front, too, during this "drôle de guerre", propaganda material was essentially only thrown and fired at each other. At the invitation of some officer friends, I once drove along the Western Wall from Karlsruhe to the Rhine bend near Basel and witnessed German and French soldiers chatting amicably across the river in front of various positions. The only shots I heard on this entire stretch of the front were fired in Breisach. A long, gaunt straw dummy with an umbrella was hanging from a crane in the harbor. Shotguns and machine guns from both the Western Wall and the Maginot Line were shooting at this unmistakable target.

There was a widespread belief among the German people that the war in the West would no longer lead to a clash of arms and would one day end in a compromise peace. I personally shared this hope. The "Deutsch- Französische Gesellschaft" had officially ceased its activities after the French declaration of war. However, it had made contact with the High Command of the Wehrmacht and the Red Cross in order to help care for the French prisoners and wounded who had fallen into German hands in the battles in the Warndt and the Saarwald. Among them was the young poet Patrice de la Tour du Pin, who was able to obtain some books he had requested. A French sergeant, Andre Loyer, who had been admitted to a military hospital in the Rhineland with a fatal wound, wanted to see his wife again. The Imperial Government gave its consent, which was notified to Paris via Geneva. The French government thanked Berlin in the same way for its concession, but did not grant it.

On December 1939, the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft", in conjunction with a West German art association, published a text and illustrated book entitled "Französischer Klassizismus um 1800" (French Classicism around 1800) as a Christmas present for its members. In the foreword, which I had been asked to write, I said that despite the differences between the two peoples, these works "inspire a respect that outlasts war and peace".

As I had a lot of spare time, I also wrote an outline of the official Franco-German peace efforts of the decade before the new war and gave it the title: "An attempt at understanding from people to people". I came to the conclusion that on both sides of the Rhine, the peace work of young people, front-line fighters and professionals, the "Franco-German Society" and the "Comite FranceAI lemagne" had not been in vain. For the first time in their recent history, the two peoples faced each other without hatred and offered the world, which was only partially pleased, the astonishing spectacle that even the war that broke out between them was a "war without hatred".

But what was the situation between the two countries, what was going on in the minds of the responsible German and French heads of government?

The "anti-Munichois" had opposed a peaceful revision of Germany's eastern borders with the objection that France would not escape war with Germany through its "abdication" in Central and Eastern Europe, but would deprive itself of valuable military allies for this war. As soon as the author of "Mein Kampf" had consolidated his position on the Danube and the Vistula, he would attack on the Rhine to destroy the French hereditary

enemy.

This thesis, like every political thesis, had something going for it in theory. However, it was practically refuted by Hitler's behavior after the victory over Poland. If the "annihilation" of France had really been the intention of the author of "Mein Kampf", there was never a more favorable opportunity for its realization, both militarily and psychologically, than in late September and early October 1939. The Reich had its back free in the east. The Polish armies had been completely crushed. Berlin and Moscow were celebrating their political honeymoon. The deployment of the German assault and armored divisions on the West Wall could be accelerated so that the signal to attack was possible at any time. The atmospheric conditions for the deployment of the Luftwaffe could not have been better than in these late summer and early fall days. France, not Germany, had declared war, France, not Germany, had been the first to start the bloody hostilities on the Saar and in the Warndt. Hitler would therefore have had a good moral platform if he had taken the initiative. He knew that he could break through the Maginot Line and overrun France militarily. The German mobilization had been completed, the French were organizationally behind in many areas. With each passing day, however, the German Wehrmacht's lead was bound to diminish. Economically, too, time was not working in Germany's favor. France had access to all the raw material areas of the Eide and all trade routes by land and sea. The Reich was cut off from the world's oceans and had to rely on its scarce supplies for the consumption of many vital and war-critical goods.

If war with France had really been Hitler's preconceived intention, he would have had to throw his sword into the balance of the decision without any hesitation. Instead of In his Danzig speech on October 5, 1939, he once again offered peace to the Western powers, repeatedly withdrew orders to attack and only began the offensive nine months after the French declaration of war, when domestic political changes in France had finally made a peaceful end to the conflict illusory. Until the cabinet reshuffle in March 1940, the French government also showed little inclination to activate the war militarily. It might even have preferred it if war had not been declared at all on September 3, 1939 and the German-Polish conflict could have been settled diplomatically.

Certainly, the Quai d'Orsay behaved quite differently in the case of the Berlin ultimatum to send a Polish plenipotentiary on August 30, 1939 than in the completely parallel case of the Warsaw ultimatum to send a Lithuanian plenipotentiary on April 1, 1938. When Kaunas refused to meet the deadline set by Warsaw and Poland subsequently deployed troops at the border, the French envoy made urgent representations to the Lithuanian government to comply with the Polish demand. This demarche was expressly justified by the fact that otherwise peace would be in danger. Neither the Polish White Book nor the French Yellow Book indicate that the French diplomatic representative made a corresponding demarche to the Warsaw government regarding the German ultimatum in the last days of August 1939, although peace was certainly no less in danger at that time. The two cases even offered parallels in terms of international law. The conflict between Warsaw and Kaunas had Vilnius as its starting point, which had been awarded to Lithuania by the Inter-Allied Ambassadors' Conference, but had been forcibly annexed to Polish territory by Pilsudski. The conflict between Berlin and Warsaw was about Gdansk, which had been ceded to Germany by the Treaty of Versailles and was now being reclaimed by Germany. If, like the Quai d'Orsay, one took the view that the Inter-Allied Conference of Ambassadors and the League of Nations in Geneva were the highest international

authorities of their time, Warsaw's ultimate action in March 1938 was no more justified than Berlin's ultimate action in August 1939. Why had the French Foreign Office given urgent advice to accept the ultimatum in the first case and not in the second?

When Mussolini proposed a conference of the Great Powers on August 31, the French Council of Ministers agreed to this proposal after lengthy deliberation, and the cabinet members parted in the belief that peace had been saved once again. In anticipation of another cabinet decision, however, the Secretary of State at the Quai d'Orsay, Alexis Leger, had prematurely telephoned Rome to say that the French government rejected Mussolini's proposal. This inaccurate telephone message found its way from Rome to Berlin that very night. In the early hours of September 1, the first fighting broke out on the German-Polish border.

But even after the start of military hostilities between Germany and Poland, the French government would have preferred to localize the conflict and would not have been averse to a new conference proposal from Mussolini. In a letter to Chamberlain dated September 2, 1939, Winston Churchill reveals his "uneasiness that there is talk of a new diplomatic note in Paris" and expresses the hope that the British head of government "despite the difficulties he is encountering in France" will "declare war on Germany" and "show the way to our French friends".

The French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet would undoubtedly have personally wished to avoid declaring war on the Reich. If he did not resign on September 3, 1939, it was on the assumption that he would be able to restore a state of peace between France and Germany in his post as soon as the war in Poland was over. He was not to find the opportunity to do so. As early as mid-September, he was transferred to the Ministry of Justice and Daladier himself took over the Foreign Ministry.

A certain rhetorical and political impetuosity that was characteristic of him, as well as the southern French department he represented, had earned Daladier the nickname "le taureau du Vaucluse". Satirists claimed, however, that he was just a "bull with snail horns". It is little known that he and Hitler had arranged to meet for a *tete-a-tete* at a hunting lodge in the Taunus in October 1933. When Ribbentrop arrived with a special plane at the French airport agreed for take-off, Daladier withdrew from his plan at the last moment. He explained that he could not bear such a great responsibility alone and that he could only enter into direct talks with the German head of state if he was covered by the French Chamber. However, he took responsibility for the declaration of war on September 3, 1939 without consulting the Chamber, although he would have been constitutionally obliged to do so.

His behavior before and during the Munich Conference had been no less contradictory. The friends of peace in Paris saw him fly off to the Quadripartite Conference not without concern, as it seemed by no means certain which side he would take. However, the Führer personally liked the manner of his appearance in Munich very much, and Hitler never later expressed such sympathy for a French politician as he did for Daladier. The letters that the two heads of government exchanged at the end of August 1939 contained some politically controversial passages. On a human level, however, they were not lacking in greatness. Only two men who had experienced the horrors of war at first hand, but who believed they owed it to the national interest of their countries to take responsibility for a new war under I circumstances, could speak.

When the die was cast on September 3, 1939, Daladier greeted Quai d'Orsay officials

with the cry: "Diplomats, sac au dos!" However, this greeting was not to be interpreted as meaning that he was supporting the work of the diplomats. and recommended that they take up arms. Daladier rather wanted to express with his shout that the hour of diplomacy had now really come and that he wished to end the war diplomatically.

This intention may have been reinforced in Daladier when he gradually realized that he had become the victim of false information about Germany. He had believed reports from emigrants from the national camp that the Hitler regime would be swept away by an internal uprising at the moment of mobilization. His information about the military strength of the Reich had also been disproved by events. When I declared in Parisian political circles in June 1939 that Poland would be defeated by the Wehrmacht in fifteen days in the event of war, the French government accused me of "panic propaganda". My assumption was even to be undercut by reality. The Polish armies were not crushed in fifteen days, but in ten. Daladier's political and military sources had assured him, however, that the Warsaw allies would be able to put up resistance for six months.

In this context, a strange contradiction in the assessment of the German military potential must be pointed out, which also came to light in the French press. At the time of the Weimar Republic, when Germany was indeed disarmed, the French newspapers used a few insignificant patriotic associations as a pretext to alert their readership daily about the "German danger". In contrast, however, they systematically played down the increasing military strength of the Third Reich and even after the German blitzkrieg over Poland, they continued to cling to their thesis of the "inadequate armament" and "low morale" of the Wehrmacht.

Gamelin's strategic plan is said to have been an attack on the weakest point of the Axis, Italy. An attack against Germany had only been planned for a later date, if at all. However, the lack of an Italian declaration of war and the unexpectedly rapid defeat of Poland put paid to the French Chief of Staff's plans. Small territorial gains had been made during the advances in the run-up to the Maginot Line on the Saar, which were mainly undertaken for spectacular reasons. They were abandoned again in the last days of September 1939.

At a meeting of the Grand Council of the Allies on February 1940, Daladier called for military assistance for the Finns under attack from Russia. However, the French expeditionary force set up for this purpose was not deployed, as Sweden had mediated peace negotiations between Moscow and Helsinki.

Weygand, commander-in-chief of the French Army of the Orient, seemed to have the idea of gaining a military foothold in the Balkans and, depending on the constellation with Russia, also taking offensive action in Asia Minor. This operational idea would have been worthy of a great military leader, and its implementation would not have lacked a famous precedent. By rolling up the southern front of the Central Powers, Marshal Franchet d'Esperey

In 1918, Weygand was no less, perhaps even more decisive in the Allied victory than Marshal Foch with his offensive in the western theater of war. But even Weygand did not get beyond the plans, and his requests for a considerable reinforcement of the Orient Army were only hesitantly and inadequately met.

If General Weygand perhaps dreamed of playing the role of a new Marshal Franchet d'Esperey, it was certainly Paul Reynaud's dream to become the Clemenceau of the Second World War. A statesman with a naturally small but still lithe figure in his old age and

eloquent, Indian-slitted eyes, he had made a name for himself in politics primarily as a financial expert. In the 1920s, he was temporarily involved in Franco-German economic understanding and was once entrusted with a mission in Berlin. However, he was always primarily interested in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and after Hitler came to power he maintained the closest links with those circles in the City and Wall Street that rejected any attempt at a peaceful settlement with the Third Reich from the outset. During the Sudeten crisis, Paul Reynaud asked me what people in Germany thought of him. I replied that there were two prejudices against him in Berlin. He was considered to be the most intelligent and the most bellicose of the French politicians. In my personal opinion, however, these two prejudices were incompatible. My remark was justified in June 1940. By April 1945 it seemed to have been refuted. Today, however, Reynaud, like Churchill himself, may sometimes quietly wonder whether a strong Germany would not have been the lesser evil than a strong Russia.

After the Munich Conference, Reynaud immediately launched a very fierce counter-campaign. He was the undisputed leader of the "anti-Munichois" in France. When, after the lifting of the state of peace at the beginning of September 1939, the antagonism between the anti-Munichois and the former Munichers continued on the question of a military activation of the war, it was logical that Paul Reynaud was the most bitter opponent of stalling the war. As power in London increasingly shifted from Chamberlain to Churchill, Paul Reynaud's time had come. On March 20, 1940, the President of the Republic, Lebrun, tasked him with forming a new cabinet. Although Parliament had disavowed Daladier by abstaining, it was more than uncertain whether Reynaud would get through. In the decisive chamber session, which was attended by the British ambassador, he received only one majority vote - his own, as the Paris press jokingly pointed out. During this session, London journalists said to a Swedish colleague: "If Reynaud is overthrown, there will be hell to pay. Reynaud's fall will be seen by the British public as a victory for the Axis powers". Of course, different peoples have always had very different views on hell and paradise.

Prime Minister Reynaud did not disappoint the expectations placed in him for an activation of the war. Whereas Daladier had many communists who had followed Moscow's change of course taken into protective custody, Reynaud now began a veritable hunt for "defeatists", from which even groups on the extreme right were not spared. Even German emigrants, who had not lacked proof of loyalty to their host country, were now sent to French concentration camps simply because of their German nationality. Daladier, who retained the War Ministry, had relied primarily on his own Radical Socialist Party and the National Fraction. Reynaud also involved the Socialists in the government, with whose support he was able to introduce the 70-hour week with only one day off a month in the arms industry. The inclusion of Petain and Weygand in the cabinet was a clever move against the right-wing parties. The victor of Verdun and Marshal Foch's former chief of staff gave it the label of a "government of national unity", and its name alone was expected to have a stimulating effect on the will of the people and the army to fight.

On March 28, 1940, Reynaud travelled to London for a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Allies. The British government gave assurances that it would continue the war to the utmost, and it was jointly decided to strengthen the blockade at sea. When, on the basis of this decision and in breach of Scandinavian neutrality, mine barriers were laid in Norwegian territorial waters and on the Swedish coast at the beginning of April to impede

the export of ore to Germany, Reynaud triumphantly announced in Paris: "La route du fer est coupée". On April 9, Hitler occupied Denmark and Norway.

A division of French Alpine troops also took part in the initially turbulent battles for military domination of Norway. They were geographically more at home in the rocky world of the fjords and fjelds than they had been as an occupying force during the vote in "Upper" Silesia. In the battles around Narvik, which were initially successful for the French weapons, a captain of the Alpine troops, König, distinguished himself. In 1944, as a general, he commanded the armed forces of the French resistance movement in the interior of France and from 1945 to 1949 exercised the functions of military governor of the French occupation zone of Germany.

The failure of the Allied operation in Scandinavia and the success of the German counter-attack had major psychological consequences in both camps of the belligerents.

Hitler had proof in his hands that England and France were no longer willing to remain passive, and the conditions under which he had achieved victory in Norway must have convinced him of the strategic necessity of getting ahead of the enemy in other theaters of war as well. These military considerations had to gain the upper hand in his mind all the more as France finally entered the waters of the completely irreconcilable English war party seemed to have swung over. The Parisian press' mockery of the "German peace offensives", which were interpreted as weakness, irritated Hitler no less than the increasing number of articles in the French newspapers calling for the separation of the Rhineland and the division of the rest of the Reich into several dozen small states. Since very strict censorship had been introduced in France at the beginning of the war, Hitler assumed that the French government identified with these demands. He was reinforced in this view by a photograph reproduced on the front page of "Illustration" at the end of March 1940, in which Paul Reynaud was talking to Roosevelt's special diplomatic envoy, Sumner Welles, in front of a large map whose borders were not quite to Berlin's taste ■-- and Rome's for that matter. It later turned out that these retouchings were the work of a printer who had not found the cliché clear enough. Hitler naturally saw this as an imperialist annexation plan by the cabinet that had seized power in France at the end of March. If the author of "Mein Kampf" had denied his authorship, it was not in order to become a victim of Richelieu's "will".

In France, however, Paul Reynaud's accession to power had only temporarily awakened the spirits of war. After the failure of the Scandinavian adventure, opposition to the continuation of the war grew from day to day. Instead of cutting off Hitler's path to the Swedish iron, it had given him military domination over the whole of northern Europe. Should the west of the continent be "militarily activated" to the same effect?

Daladier was now also determined to reach a compromise peace with Germany as quickly as possible. Hundreds of deputies and above all Laval and the overwhelming majority of the Senate shared this view. By the evening of May 9, all the necessary parliamentary preparations had been made to overthrow Reynaud the next day. Early in the morning of May 10, Hitler gave the orders for the Western campaign. War had beaten peace by a few hours.

The western campaign pitted 125 German divisions against 90 French, 20 British, 20 Belgian and 5 Dutch divisions. The tank forces on both sides were in the same proportion, and the French tanks were even more heavily armored and equipped on average than the German tanks. However, the French general staff had not assembled them to meet the

needs of modern warfare. Thus, 10 German armoured divisions, each with 300 combat vehicles, stood against 3 recently formed French armoured divisions of 150 combat vehicles each and 3 divisions of lighter tanks and motorized guns. In the air, the ratio of forces was 1:5 in favor of Germany. The French armament was practically eliminated after the first day of fighting.

On May 12, the French army withdrew to the southern bank of the Meuse, and by May 1, the entire Meuse position was in German hands.

On May 18, the day of the fall of Peronne, Amiens and Saint-Quentin, Reynaud reshuffled his cabinet. Daladier resigned from the War Ministry to make way for Marshal Petain, who was appointed Deputy Prime Minister at the same time. Gamelin was replaced by Weygand as supreme commander. Mandel took over the Ministry of the Interior. The new Chief of the General Staff had the line of fortified bases named after him built in the Somme and Aisne river basin as an interception point against further German advances.

On May 20, the German tanks entered Abbeville, and on May 24, Boulogne fell. On May 27, the Belgian army surrendered, and on May 28, the British High Command ordered its troops to retreat and embark at Dunkirk.

After a brief pause in the fighting, the Wehrmacht attacked the Weygand Line on June 5. Rouen was in German hands on June 12, Paris on June 14 and Besancon on June 17.

On June 6, Weygand had already called on the government to conclude an immediate armistice with the Reich. On June 10, Italy entered the war against France. On June 13, at Conde Castle near Tours, where the French government had retreated from the German armies advancing on the capital, discussions were held with Churchill and General Spears on the continuation of the battle. There was a fierce argument between Weygand and Reynaud, who supported the English position of extending the French resistance.

On June 15, the French government moved its headquarters to Bordeaux. In view of the now completely hopeless situation, Marshal Petain and Secretary of State Baudouin, who was in charge of the Foreign Minister's affairs, joined Weygand in voting for an immediate armistice.

However, Reynaud still rejected this proposal. He still clung his hopes to an appeal for help from France to President Roosevelt, who, however, gave a disappointing reply. Reynaud was all the more eager to take up Churchill's last-minute suggestion that France and Britain should form a joint state in order to continue the fight in North Africa. Britain would bear the main financial burden. However, if France were to conclude a separate peace with Germany, it should at least hand over its fleet to Britain in return for being released from its alliance obligations.

The French Council of Ministers rejected Churchill's proposals and Reynaud resigned. The President of the Republic, Lebrun, commissioned Marshal Petain to form the new government. Petain appointed Weygand as Minister of War and Chautemps as Deputy Prime Minister. The rest of the cabinet was also an attempt to make both the right and the left responsible. In addition to outspoken representatives of nationalist groups such as Alibert, Bouthillier, Ybarnegaray and Baudouin, who remained in the Foreign Office, the new cabinet also included the radical socialist Pomaret and the socialists Riviere and Fevrier.

On June 17, the newly formed French government asked Madrid to mediate an armistice with the Reich.

On June 21, the French delegates led by General Huntziger arrived at the forest clearing of Rhetondes near Compiègne for the armistice negotiations.

When I saw Hitler's outburst of joy on the German newsreel on hearing the news of the French surrender, I was unpleasantly touched. His gestures and facial expressions seemed to me not quite suited to the greatness of the hour. I had to think of King Frederick II, whom Hitler admired so much, who stayed away from the victory parade after the Seven Years' War to listen to Johann Sebastian Bach's chorales in the solitude of a Berlin church.

Ambassador Noel, who accompanied the French armistice delegation to Compiègne as a diplomatic representative, recalled that the Führer had shown an impassive face at the presentation of the French delegation, but that several German generals had tears in their eyes at the moment of the signing of the agreement. I believe that similar feelings moved many officers and soldiers of the Wehrmacht and that they were also shared by the broadest sections of the German population. The pride over the quick and incomparable victory was mixed with a feeling for the tragedy of the new course of arms, which had not been desired by the French people or the French soldiers. Even in the fierce battles that had occurred in some places during the Western campaign, the war had remained a war without hatred.

The ceasefire

Laying down arms is always a difficult decision for a country. It places itself more or less at the mercy or disgrace of the victor. Current world opinion reproaches Hitler for not having asked for an armistice when the military situation had become hopeless for Germany. At the same time, it reproaches Marshal Petain for having concluded an armistice in June 1940, although the situation of the French armies was no less hopeless at the time.

At this point, France no longer had the military means to prevent the occupation of its entire territory by the Wehrmacht. Under these circumstances, every day of further fighting brought useless bloodshed. Every day that delayed the conclusion of an armistice - and this is often forgotten today - plunged the millions of refugees wandering the streets without shelter, without food, without care into more terrible misery; every day could mean that hundreds of thousands of French women, children and old people perished from deprivation and disease.

If the conclusion of an armistice was an urgent necessity for France in June 1940, there was no compelling reason for Germany to conclude one. As Hitler refrained from pursuing the British returning to their island after Dunkirk and postponed the invasion of Great Britain, it made no difference to the German Wehrmacht whether the armistice with France came about immediately or only after the remaining territories had been occupied. One advantage could be seen in the neutralization of the French fleet and colonial army during later hostilities against England. However, given the overestimation of the Italian colonial and naval forces, which was still common practice in German circles at this time, this aspect was probably not a decisive factor. Therefore, if the Imperial government complied with the French request for an armistice, this decision may have been influenced by the fact that it had not wanted war with France in the first place and undoubtedly regretted having been forced to fight it in blood.

At the suggestion of Propaganda Minister Goebbels, the same place in the Rhetondes forest and the same saloon car were chosen as the venue for the negotiations, which had already served as the setting for the armistice of 1918. Despite this underlining of the historical parallel, however, the entire outward appearance of the meeting revealed a clear desire to pay tribute to the defeated

opponents to show their military respect. On the arrival of the French delegation, a German honorary company presented arms before them. The recognition of the military bravery of the opposing army in the declaration read out by Colonel General Keitel before the start of the negotiations, as well as the German proposal to rise up after the signing of the agreement to commemorate the fallen of both countries, testified to the same spirit.

It is in the nature of an armistice that it is very detailed in all military matters, but leaves political matters largely open. The Franco-German armistice treaty of June 22, 1940 also followed this custom.

When the French government approached the Spanish government on June 17 to broker an armistice, it had not only asked for a cessation of hostilities, but also for the terms of peace to be announced. The Spanish ambassador Lequerica did not fail to draw Foreign Minister Baudouin's attention to the unusual nature of this proposal. In fact, the imperial government remained silent on the second point.

However, this German restraint was to prove a serious mistake in the period that followed. For a short period, the Armistice Agreement of June 22, 1940 could have sufficed to settle the most urgent administrative issues; however, as the planned invasion of England and the expected end of the war receded further and further into the distance, the many important issues left out of the agreement must have had a disruptive and paralyzing effect on the relationship between the two countries.

Articles 2 and 3 of the armistice agreement were particularly important for subsequent political developments. They divided the country into an occupied northern zone and an unoccupied southern zone, but left the French government free to take up residence in the unoccupied territory or to relocate to Paris. The administrative authorities of the northern zone were obliged to cooperate properly with the occupying power. The word "collaboration" appears for the first time in the French version of this provision. Article 10 was no less significant in terms of international law and politics, in which the French government undertook not to undertake any hostile acts against the German Reich with any of its remaining military forces or in any other way and to prohibit its nationals from serving in the armed forces of countries still at war with Germany. French nationals acting contrary to this provision would be treated as franchisees by the German troops.

Article 23 stipulated that the Franco-German armistice agreement would only come into force six hours after the conclusion of an armistice between France and Italy. General Huntziger therefore went with Reiner's delegation from Compiègne by plane to Rome, where he concluded the armistice with Italy on June 24 after a brief negotiation with Marshal Badoglio.

The French government did not make use of the possibility of moving its headquarters to Paris, but after the cessation of military hostilities moved from Bordeaux to the city of Clermont-Ferrand in unoccupied territory and from there a few days later to the neighboring seaside resort of Vichy.

There, the National Assembly expressed its confidence in the government that had concluded the armistice by an overwhelming majority. Of the deputies and senators present, 569 voted in favor and only 80 against Petain. The President of the Republic, Lebrun, resigned and Marshal Petain took on the role of Head of State as well as Head of Government. At the suggestion of Laval, who, like the neo-socialist Marquet, had joined the cabinet on June 23, Petain was even granted powers that no French head of state had possessed since Louis XIV. "The National Assembly," read the law in question, "confers unlimited powers on the government of the Republic, in the person of Marshal Petain, to promulgate the new constitution of the French state by one or more decrees. This Constitution shall guarantee the rights of labor, of the family and of the fatherland. It shall be ratified by the assemblies provided for by the new Constitution."

In taking this decision, the chambers reflected the mood of the population, which unanimously approved of the conclusion of the armistice, looked up to Petain as the "savior of the fatherland" and saw the military collapse as the political collapse of the preceding regime.

On the fourth anniversary of the French request for an armistice, June 17, 1944, Marshal Petain described the situation at the time to the writer Roger Martin du Gard in the following words: "On me passait la faillite et débrouillez-vous! Mr. Reynaud only approached me when the catastrophe had already happened. And it was me who personally rescued these gentlemen. Perhaps they no longer remember that. At the time, I received calls from all over France, from civil servants - their own civil servants - from the

bourgeoisie, from the working classes - and what calls - to put them up against the wall; Mr. Reynaud and, number one, Mr. Blum - all the French urged me to shoot them."

Some abdicated French ministers and parliamentarians who did not agree with the new government's offer of an armistice had left Bordeaux on the steamer "Massilia" on June 20, the day before the negotiations began. Daladier and Mandel were among them. They set course for North Africa to continue the fight there. On their arrival in Casablanca, however, they were temporarily arrested by the resident Nogues, whereupon they returned to France without having achieved anything.

Reynaud tried to escape via Spain, but was injured in a car accident on the way to the border and had to abandon his plan as a result.

The subsequent development of the international situation and the shift in the balance of military power caused by the entry of America and Soviet Russia into the war make it seem more justifiable today that a few French politicians did not lay down their arms at the time and - as Marcel Deat polemically pointed out in an article in "Oeuvre" - wanted to continue the "fight under the coconut palms of the Sahara". However, the plan to transfer the still intact French armies from the mainland to North Africa was, as the French naval commander Darlan once explained to me personally, an absurdity. After the surrender and the losses of French naval vessels at Dunkirk, the available shipping space would have been barely sufficient to transport a division. If the armistice had not been concluded, not only would countless civilians who had fled have run the risk of perishing from privation and disease on the roads, but one million more soldiers would have been taken prisoner by the Germans.

It is less easy to answer the question of whether Hitler made a mistake in concluding the armistice. If the battle had continued, the French land forces would probably have achieved local successes against their Axis partner by the time German units arrived in their rear and the French fleet would have taken some Italian coastal towns under fire. But Spain, which had only recently switched from "neutrality" to "non-warfare" and had seized Tangier, would undoubtedly have allowed Wehrmacht units to cross the Pyrenees and force the British out of Gibraltar under the immediate impression of the German blitzkrieg in France. Given the undisputed superiority of the German air force at the time, it would probably have been relatively quick and easy to clear not only the Mediterranean but also French North Africa of enemy threats after the capture of Gibraltar. Military experts today, especially on the Allied side, therefore tend to believe that the conclusion of the Franco-German armistice of June 22, 1940 was disadvantageous for the Reich.

In fact, the agreement could only be justified if it immediately went beyond the usual framework of an armistice and made the defeated party an ally on the basis of a generous peace offer.

We know today from English publications how much London feared the formation of a Franco-German alliance at this time. In "Journey down a blind alley", Mary Borden recounts a conversation she had during these critical days with General Spears, the British liaison officer to the French High Command, who had just returned to England. "France, he told me, would be cut off from the rest of the world and constantly subjected to propaganda aimed at turning her against us. Such a thought might seem inconceivable, but the war could last a very long time, and the French would not be able to resist. The French population will only hear what the Germans like. In addition, it might become necessary for us to bomb French cities. If German propaganda succeeded in making the

French nation take up arms against us, we could lose the war. There was only one effective counterweight to German influence: the fact that a French army was fighting alongside us. - 'And de Gaulle is the man to do this?'⁴ - 'Yes, the cabinet has recognized de Gaulle as the head of the French resistance movement.'⁴⁴

General de Gaulle - this title was not, as has been claimed, conferred on him in England, but by the French government shortly before the collapse - was indisputably one of the most capable and strategically far-sighted French general staff officers before the war. His 1935 treatise "Vers une armee de metier" called for a stronger contingent of professional soldiers in the French army and a shift in operational plans towards the increasingly important armored weapon. The pamphlet, which was also published in German by a Potsdam publisher under the title "Frankreichs Stoßarmee"⁴⁴, did not, however, receive the attention it deserved in the relevant French military circles. On June 5, the day of the breakthrough of the Weygand Line, Reynaud transferred the Secretariat of State in the Ministry of Defense to Colonel de Gaulle during a second reshuffle of his cabinet. However, when Marshal Petain took over the reins of government, de Gaulle was again relieved of this post and was also left out of the distribution of military command posts. On June 17, the day of the French request for an armistice, he gave the aforementioned British liaison officer to the French High Command, General Spears, an escort to the Bordeaux airfield for protocol reasons, but at the last moment swung himself into the plane taking off for England. The very next day, June 18, he made his first radio address to the French population from London, in which he rejected the idea of an armistice and called on the country to continue its resistance against Germany by all means.

Marshal Petain, in whose environment de Gaulle had worked for a long time and had also received support, was extremely upset by the insubordination of his former staff officer. "I have nourished a snake in my bosom"⁴⁴, he often used to say. De Gaulle, whose tall stature, hair and eye color betrayed the Northern Frenchman, came from an old aristocratic family; his father had held a chair in history at the University of Lille. As the French have little credit for their Germanic heritage, but also like to emphasize their Gallic origins alongside their Latin heritage, the very name of the head of the French resistance movement was a program. "Imagine"⁴⁴, a Vichy government minister once told me, "you would have had a 'General of Germania'⁴ in the German Freikorps or the Black Reichswehr after 1918"⁽⁴⁴⁾

'Despite his illustrious name and the unlimited support he received from Great Britain and the Commonwealth, de Gaulle's resistance movement against Petain initially met with little success.

The correct and in many cases even downright obliging behavior of the German troops in the Western campaign had destroyed many ingrained prejudices about Germany in the French population that had been inculcated by propaganda. With regard to England, however, the opposite mood began to change. It was no secret that London had laid down the law of action to Paris when it declared war in September 1939. In view of the staggering military defeat, the French people held not only their own government but also the British government responsible for the catastrophe that had befallen France. The embarkation of the English army in Dunkirk, the equally surprising withdrawal of the English land forces from the Breton theater of war and the absence of the requested assistance of the English air force gave fuel to the slogan going from mouth to mouth that "England wanted to fight to the last Frenchman." Thousands of French officers and

soldiers who had become prisoners of war in Dunkirk offered to fight on the side of the Wehrmacht against the British. Wherever Frenchmen talked to Germans in the weeks that followed, they almost invariably expressed a spontaneous desire to change their alliance.

This desire was no less widespread among the German army and people. When the western campaign began, the German public assumed that Hitler only wanted to gain a more favorable starting point for the operations against England and would cross from the French Channel coast to the British Isles. Up to the highest military and political echelons, the enemy was not seen in Paris, but in London. The general astonishment was all the greater when Hitler renounced the pursuit of the fleeing English in Dunkirk and directed his strategic operations towards the heart of France.

The reasons that may have motivated him to do so cannot be explained solely by meteorological reports and reports about the military difficulties of a landing operation in England. If Hitler had really been determined to carry out such an operation, even the strongest technical objections would not have caused him to abandon his plan.

1 Even according to the current state of research into the history of the war, it can be assumed as almost certain that Hitler deliberately allowed the British to escape to Dunkirk. The British expeditionary force was already practically surrounded when Hitler unexpectedly ordered his Leibstandarte, which had advanced across the La Bassee Canal, back and, by halting the German tank attack, enabled the defeated enemy to withdraw to the port city of Dunkirk. The fear of a possible flank attack

Weygands from the south could not possibly have had a say in Hitler's decision, which was fiercely opposed by the German general staff. In certain Wehrmacht circles, there was a tendency to assume that Göring had begrudged the Land Army the final success over the British Expeditionary Force and had therefore suggested to the Führer that the enemy board the ships and have the Luftwaffe drill them into the ground on the Channel.

The envoy Hewel, who was in charge of liaison between the Reich Foreign Minister and Hitler, once gave me another personal interpretation of the incident. On the evening of the decision, which was so decisive for the further conduct of the war, Hitler had confided to him that "he would not have been able to bring himself to destroy an army of such good English blood". That Hitler could have had such thoughts is perhaps not as improbable as it might seem at first glance. After all, in the second winter of the Russian campaign, he once expressed his astonishment at the table in the Führer's headquarters that "in this decisive battle between the Germanic tribes and the Slavs, the English were on the side of the Slavs."

But wouldn't the Nordic racial theory, which was held in such high esteem in the Third Reich, have been called upon to give Hitler a more sober assessment of English toughness? Were the Anglo-Saxons of Great Britain not of the same ilk as the Frisian peasants, who would rather lose house and farm to the lawyers than give in in a lawsuit over a completely irrelevant piece of land? Was there not something of the bulldog in the English national character, reluctant to take up the fight but unable to open its jaws of its own accord once it has bitten into an opponent?

It was the tragedy of Franco-German relations at the time of the armistice that Hitler would have preferred a compromise peace with England and considered such a compromise peace possible. As a result, the favorable conditions for a generous agreement with France remained unused. Even Churchill had considered the possibility of a separate Franco-German peace at Conde Castle on June 13 and - as we recall - demanded the

surrender of the French fleet to Great Britain as a pledge of British agreement. When the newly formed French government requested the German peace terms at the same time as the armistice on June 17, it was perhaps more than just a misjudgment of the difference between these two diplomatic steps. In any case, all it would have taken was a word from Hitler and the political talks between Germany and France would have been in full swing at that point.

Hitler did not speak this word. His eyes were not on the future during the armistice, but on the past to an astonishing extent for a revolutionary party leader.

The choice of location for the armistice negotiations alone must have raised suspicions. Whoever could think of nothing better than Compiègne for the armistice, it was to be feared that he would have nothing better for the peace treaty " AbM*

better than Versailles. Certainly, the Compiègne of June 1940 varied pleasingly in tone and presentation from the Compiègne of November 1918, but the German declaration preceding the negotiation emphasized too much the injustice committed against Germany - from non-compliance with Wilson's 14 points to the dictate of the devastating peace terms - not to leave the will for a historical reckoning as a basic impression. Those who wanted to build a new Europe had a duty to destroy Versailles, but they did not have the right to allow resentment over Versailles to hinder the rebuilding of Europe.

In addition to the illusion of being able to reach a compromise with England, Hitler's indecision at this crucial time for the future of Franco-German relations was probably also influenced by considerations of Italy.

Since the sabotage of the Franco-German declaration of friendship on December 6, 1938, Roman policy had undergone many fluctuations, but had remained faithful in its opposition to an understanding between Berlin and Paris. Italy was undoubtedly trying to dissuade Hitler from an armed conflict with Poland. However, by assuring England that it would stay out of the war, it may have contributed in no small measure to its outbreak. Between the Polish and Western campaigns, Rome even seems to have flirted at times with the idea of joining the Allied camp. But when France was completely defeated, Italy entered the war against it at the last hour. The Italian newspapers outdid themselves in their spitefulness towards the "Latin sister", the like of which the press of the "cousin german" on the other side of the Rhine had never known during all those agitated years. It was demonstrably Italian planes that bombarded the stream of refugees from the north with machine-gun fire on the roads of central and southern France, while the German air force had shown every conceivable consideration for the civilian population during the entire French campaign.

If it was a coincidence at all, it was certainly not a happy one that Hitler and Mussolini met in Munich on June 17, 1940, the day of the French request for an armistice. Later statements by the Duce and Ciano allow the conclusion that, if Hitler had had generous armistice terms for France in mind at all, he was certainly not encouraged by his Axis partner. On November 10, 1942, I saw Italian and German general staff officers in the Führerhaus in Munich making operational preparations for the occupation of the French southern zone the following day. They were bent over a map showing the line up to which the Italians had wanted to advance militarily and occupy France in June 1940. It could not be said that their goal was short.

According to eyewitness reports, the conclusion of the Italian-French armistice on June

24 in Koni took place in a very conciliatory manner.

played out. However, this did not prevent Count Ciano from asserting Italian claims to Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Tunis, part of Algeria, Syria and Djibouti in Berlin on July 7. .

As a result of the Axis alliance, the Reich was no longer free in its policy towards France. Like the armistice, a political agreement with France was conditional on the simultaneous conclusion of a political agreement between France and Italy. The Italian demands, however, ruled out such an agreement from the outset. Even if Hitler had overcome his own mistrust of France and opted for a constructive Franco-German policy, he would have been faced with a choice between Rome and Paris. Should he alienate an ally who appeared politically secure through the person of the Duce in order to gain an ally who was militarily very valuable but politically highly insecure? The tragedy of German policy towards France during the armistice lay in this dilemma, and the Italian mortgage weighed no less heavily on Franco-German relations than the English one.

The war would have taken a different turn if there had been more than just a cessation of "military" hostilities between Germany and France after the Western campaign. But the hour was not seized. The iron was not forged while it was hot. By the time political talks began between the two governments a few months later, the psychological conditions had already become much less favorable.

My appointment as ambassador in Paris

One day in March 1940, Ribbentrop asked me abruptly and almost rudely: "Do you actually have anything against the Foreign Office? You are the only one of the old employees in my office who has never expressed the wish to be taken on by the Foreign Office." I replied to the Foreign Minister that I preferred to work in the free framework of the office rather than in a ministry, whereupon he broke off the conversation with the remark: "I don't know whether I can always take that into consideration."

A few days later, the personnel department of the Foreign Office sent me a certificate of appointment as envoy. I only saw Ribbentrop himself again when the Western campaign began. "Stand by for a mission in France," he told me during a short stay he took from the Führer's headquarters in Berlin. On the evening of June 14, the telephone rang: "State conversation, urgent - the Reich Foreign Minister wishes to speak to you." A few seconds later I heard Ribbentrop's voice on the line. "Fly off to the Führer's headquarters this very night with a small task force. Paris is about to fall. You will receive further instructions here."

At that time, the Führer's headquarters were located in the "Chateau d'Ardenne" near the Belgian-French border. I reported there punctually the next morning. The "detailed instructions" I was given consisted of purely technical guidelines. I was to install myself immediately with my staff in the German Embassy building and - until the appointment of a "military commander in France" - represent the Foreign Office at the "military commander in Paris". I would still receive the political instructions.

I jic orientation, which I personally wanted to give to my mission, emerged from the choice of employees who accompanied me to Paris at my request and who were all as good connoisseurs of France as they were convinced supporters of a policy of understanding. The "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" was represented by the Vice President of its Berlin headquarters, Professor Grimm, and by the President of its branch in the Hanseatic cities, Rudolf Sc Meier. For the press and cultural tasks, I had won over Dr. Sieburg, the long-time Paris correspondent of the "Frankfurter Zeitung", and Dr. Fpting, the former head of the "German Academic Exchange Service" in France. For the predominantly diplomatic tasks, I had been given the

Dr. Achenbach was placed at the disposal of the German Foreign Office. He had been a member of the German Embassy in Paris before the war.

Professor Grimm's extensive legal practice soon called him back to Germany, and he was only able to devote himself to his work at the embassy during occasional visits to France. Dr. Sieburg's involvement was also relatively short-lived. The author of "God in France?" felt emotionally depressed "to see Paris, which he had known in happiness, in misfortune."

Dr. Epting did not take the same standpoint. As founder and director of the "German Institute", he proved how important it can be for a local artistic and intellectual life to find people and institutions in the foreign occupying power who are sympathetic to it. The organizational management of the Paris working group was in the hands of Rudolf Schleier, who had a civil servant relationship with the Foreign Office and held the post of first embassy councillor as envoy. As he himself had been taken prisoner of war in France

during the First World War, he paid particular attention to the release and improvement of the situation of French prisoners of war in Germany, despite the many general official duties that weighed on him. Counsellor Dr. Achenbach took over the management of the embassy's political department, to which the protocol department was also attached and on whose shoulders the largest and most important workload of the authority rested. Over the coming weeks and months, the Foreign Office also made it possible to set up and expand all the other departments and technical services required for the work of a mission by transferring officials to Paris.

At the beginning of August, I was given the rank of ambassador and at the end of November of the same year, the title "German Embassy in Paris" was officially introduced for the office of "Representative of the Foreign Office to the Military Commander in France". "Ambassador Abetz", read the relevant Führer directive, "is responsible for dealing with all political issues in occupied and unoccupied territory. If military interests are affected in the pursuit of these tasks, he must act in agreement with the responsible military authorities. The current relationship between the German Embassy in Paris and the French Government will not be affected by this regulation. Until peace is concluded, the mission is not officially accredited. However, it is instructed to maintain permanent contact with the French Government and to monitor its relations with third countries."

The reasons that could have motivated Hitler and Ribbentrop to give me the diplomatic mission in Paris can be interpreted in various ways. For the Reich Foreign Minister, the fact that I was a man from his old office and that my personal French connections from the pre-war period could also be of use to German foreign policy under the changed circumstances may have been decisive. With Hiller

no doubt played a decisive role in my expulsion from France in the summer of 1939. He had the prejudice that a diplomat who enjoyed unqualified popularity in his foreign circle of influence was less suited to his post than a diplomat who found strong opposition in hostile foreign circles. The excessive press campaign that had accompanied my ban on my stay in France therefore had to draw its attention to the eccentric young party member who had undeservedly become its object.

Perhaps when I was sent to Paris Hitler was still toying with the idea of trying to reach an understanding with France despite everything, or at least to keep the door open to such an attempt. The fact that Hitler did not believe in the possibility of a Franco-German understanding did not exclude the possibility that he would not have considered a Franco-German understanding desirable.

As I took up my post at the Paris embassy without any political instructions from the Reich government, but was approached from all sides for information on the situation of the Franco-German question, I was not in an easy position. I was no longer the head of the Sohlberg Circle or the "foreign policy buccaneer" who could pursue a policy of understanding on his own initiative with a very general blanket authorization from Ribbentrop. I was now a civil servant, an official representative of the highest Reich authority and had forfeited my personal freedom of action with the diplomatic title that had been bestowed on me without being asked.

My temperament and inner conviction tempted me to plunge headlong into a policy of cooperation with France. My official capacity and the resulting external responsibility meant that I stood hesitantly on the springboard for quite a long time.

In 1948, the French Secretary of State, Baron Benoist-Mechin, recounted a conversation he had with me at the beginning of the occupation in the following words: "I found Abetz very moved by the military events that had just taken place. On the one hand, he was visibly proud of his country's great military successes, but on the other hand he was also concerned that these successes were at the expense of France, with which he had a real sympathy and with which, as is well known, he also had family ties.

Eager to know how the new ambassador intended to fulfill the mission he had been given, I asked him the direct question: 'And what are you going to do now? Will you take advantage of the situation to crush us?' Abetz replied verbatim: 'I have no precise instructions from my superiors **about what they** intend to do with me. I was suddenly ordered to Paris by telephone, nothing **more**. This allows me to put forward two hypotheses. Either the Führer wanted to get one over on the Parisians by forcing a German on them who had recently been expelled from France as undesirable, or else the Führer was working on the assumption that I had been dealing with French questions in the Ribbentrop office for several years.

I have always endeavored to reach an understanding with France and am therefore not unsuitable for the post entrusted to me. As I have not received any instructions, I can stick to one or the other thesis. I have decided in favor of the second and will stick to this choice as long as orders from above do not show me that I was wrong."

My point of view at the beginning of the occupation is no less clear from a conversation that is reproduced in another official French report. It is dated July 23, 1940, so was written down under the direct impression of the conversation. The author is not recognizable from the document, but appears to have been a confidant of Laval, as he discusses his first journey from Vichy to Paris in detail.

"I asked Abetz," the reporter notes, "whether or not the Germans would like to attempt cooperation with the government of Marshal Petain, represented in particular by Mr. Pierre Laval. For his boss and for himself personally, Abetz answered in the affirmative. However, as he did not know the Führer's attitude, he advised the greatest caution. He added: 'Unfortunately, my guess is that our views on Franco-German relations are no longer the same as they were before the war and will not be the same for a long time to come. I am not aware of the Führer's current attitude; according to his statements and conversations, a hard peace is imminent. Our propaganda presents your government in a light which shows that Hitler probably expects nothing from moral guarantees and is intent on extensive territorial safeguards. I fear that he will make great concessions to Italy - and even to Spain - in the Mediterranean area. I therefore do not want to let the French, whom we respect, take a path that will lead them to disappointment. The most valuable forces for Franco-German relations would run the risk of being broken by this task'."

If I warned the French, who wanted to re-establish political relations with Germany, not to be too hasty, I encouraged the no less numerous Germans who came to the embassy in the opposite direction.

The Army High Command was based in Fontainebleau at the time. At the suggestion of Quartermaster General Wagner, troop commanders and smaller groups of officers from the operational armies came to the embassy almost daily to find out about German policy in France. I often quoted to my military visitors the words from Jean Giraudoux's "La guerre

de Troie n'aura pas lieu" that "war requires the hatred of civilians, since after victory the front-line fighters tend to fraternize with the defeated opponent." Even if I wasn't a soldier, I used to add, I didn't want to be considered a civilian in this respect.

"In the period immediately after the armistice," explained a German general in 1948, "Otto Abetz spoke to the commanders-in-chief of the troops under French command. and the military commander to release the French prisoners of war still remaining in the prison camps in France. Otto Abetz wanted to take on any difficulties on the part of the higher German authorities."

June came to an end and July dawned, but I had still not received any political instructions from the Foreign Office or the Führer's headquarters. However, the stream of German and French visitors to the embassy continued from early morning until late evening, and my staff could only answer the countless political questions put to them evasively or as they saw fit.

In view of the many applications for approval of newspapers, magazines and organizations, we recommended that the responsible administrative and censorship departments of the military commander proceed as liberally as possible and in particular avoid the impression that the occupying power was unilaterally taking sides with the French political right. The newspaper "La France au travail" was founded with the support of the embassy in order to provide the working class with a press organ.

In Brittany, the defense and the propaganda squadron of the military commander promoted local efforts aimed at state separation of this area from France. Remembering the poisoning effect that French support for Rhineland separatism had had on Franco-German relations for many years after its failure, I spoke out against supporting the Breton separatists. I recommended that they should initially limit their efforts to achieving cultural autonomy.

An unimaginably large part of the embassy's activities was taken up by protocol tasks. Most of the foreign diplomatic and consular missions had remained in Paris, but the French Foreign Office had moved to the unoccupied zone. As a result, many of the normal duties of protocol at the Quai d'Orsay practically fell to my staff, not to mention the procurement of identity cards and passes, food and petrol allocations that had become necessary due to the occupation. There was hardly a day without official receptions and meals at the embassy. In addition to the army commanders who came through the French capital on official business, occupied Paris also frequently had representative civilian visitors from the Reich and the allied countries. As a result, my staff often had more protocol obligations in a single week than an embassy in peacetime had in a whole year. The only leading personality who never came to Paris during my time as ambassador was the Reich Foreign Minister.

The consular department also had its hands full from day one. The Foreign Office had entrusted the office with the care of German and Belgian civilians who had been liberated from French captivity. Among the latter were several personalities who I knew from were known from the pre-war period. What they said about the treatment they had received during their imprisonment and the medical records that were kept of their physical condition shook me to the core. For the first time I realized that in twentieth-century Western Europe it was still possible to use police methods that I had thought were a monopoly of Eastern countries and earlier centuries. Subsequent events were to teach me,

of course, that in the course of the war all belligerents, including my own country, had dishonored themselves by such methods against the defenseless.

Given the great importance of Paris as a city of art and science, the Embassy worked to ensure that theater, music, lectures and exhibitions could resume normal operations as quickly as possible. I succeeded in having the military commander authorize the reopening of the Sorbonne and all other universities in the occupied territory.

By special order from Hitler and Ribbentrop, I was entrusted with the protection of art in occupied France during the first weeks of the occupation and until this task was taken over by other agencies. On the one hand, this involved securing private collections, primarily Jewish collections, whose owners were absent; on the other, securing public collections that had been evacuated from the museums. These seizures were intended to protect French art holdings that were endangered by the circumstances of the war, but also to serve the Reich as collateral for the peace treaty. I will come back to the legal question raised by this, which incidentally was already prejudiced by the Treaty of Versailles.

The fact that the embassy, which had no executive powers, received this commission was due to a special wish of the Reich Foreign Minister. An ancestor of Ribbentrop's had been Marshal Blücher's war superintendent at the Peace of Vienna in 1815 and had been entrusted with the return of the Prussian art treasures looted by the Napoleonic armies, but had been misled by the director of the Louvre. It was therefore obvious that the Reich Foreign Minister wanted his representative to mend this breach.

One task that was purely within the administrative remit of the military commander, but which had a major political impact, was the gradual repatriation of the millions of refugees who had fled from the German armies to the south of France. The demarcation line between occupied and unoccupied territory was hermetically sealed for private passenger and postal traffic soon after the armistice. As a result, the refugees remained separated from their families and without news of them. The embassy therefore immediately campaigned for a relaxation of the regulations and was the first to achieve the introduction of so-called "cartes inter- zones" for private correspondence and passes across the demarcation line for urgent family matters.

Paris, which in the first few days - with the exception of a few working-class suburbs - made an almost deserted impression, slowly filled up again with its inhabitants. First the ordinary people and the middle class, who had left the city on foot and by bicycle, returned. Finally, those who had left in their own cars also arrived. The German bat bar had not turned out to be quite as bad as the press and radio had made it out to be. In many districts, especially the popular ones, there were even scenes of fraternization. I remember a small café on one of the large boulevards where, on one of the first Sundays after the occupation, a curious crowd of French people crowded around a grenadier from Briesen's division. "Or kaput, travail or", declared the young soldier, whose linguistic accent and elastic movements betrayed the I lambourg dockworker. Pulling up the sleeve of his tunic, he flexed his impressive biceps: "Voilà mon or". The audience applauded this demonstration of economic philosophy with great enthusiasm.

Parallel to the friendship for Germany, hostility towards England developed among the French population. This change of mood reached its peak when news arrived of the attack on the French fleet in Mers-el-Kebir. As the squadron anchored there had refused a British ultimatum to surrender, it was taken under fire by British warships on July 3, 1940. Only

the battleship "Strasbourg" remained maneuverable and was able to escape through the minefields. "La Bretagne" was hit in the ammunition chamber and took 997 of her crew with her. "Le Mogador" and "La Provence" suffered the same fate. The flagship "Dunkerque" suffered 150 casualties among its crew after the shelling, but was still able to stay afloat. On July 6, the British sank it with aerial torpedoes during a second attack and machine-gunned the sailors as they fled to safety, bringing the total death toll to 1,400.

The British admiral in command of this operation initially refused to carry out the order and only obeyed it when it was expressly repeated by the London War Cabinet.

The London government cited the "national emergency" as justification for its action, which was contrary to international law. The Axis powers were about to lay their hands on the French fleet. However, this claim contradicted the facts. After the German collapse, the Allied intelligence services discovered the secret reports of the German navy on the confidential meetings between Grand Admiral Raeder and Hitler. In the weeks in question, they contain not the slightest indication of British subordination. In accordance with Article 8 of the Armistice Agreement, some of the French warships under German and Italian control had been disarmed and others released for the needs of the French colonial empire. Neither the units in the harbors of the mother country nor the units at sea had been exposed in any way to the Axis powers.

Mers-el-Kebir caused a tremendous uproar not only in the French navy, but also in the French army and among the French people as a whole. Several hundred airmen signed up on lists for reprisal flights over London and Gibraltar. Some of these planned reprisals by the French air force were carried out over Gibraltar.

In London, General de Gaulle called on the supporters of the French resistance movement to observe a minute's silence for the victims of Mers-el-Kebir.

In Berlin, the incident was heavily exploited for propaganda purposes, but did not have the political consequences for Franco-German relations that would have been obvious. In a meeting between Hitler and Grand Admiral Raeder on July 11, the question of greater freedom of movement for the French fleet and especially the submarine force was raised; for operations in the Atlantic the question was answered in the negative, for the defense of the naval bases in Dakar and Casablanca it was left for consideration and for the entire Mediterranean area it was made dependent on Italy's agreement. However, Italian consent was of course impossible to obtain, as Count Ciano had just presented the Roman demands for Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Tunis, part of Algiers, Djibouti and Syria in the imperial capital on July 7, the day after Mers-el-Kebir. On July 19, amid general euphoria, Hitler delivered his great Reichstag speech, in which he gave an account of the victorious Western campaign and once again offered peace to England.

The great political and human trust that I had previously had in Ribbentrop received its first blow when, shortly afterwards, I personally expressed my indignation at the British raid on the French fleet in Mers-el-Kebir. "In Churchill's place," the Reich Foreign Minister replied, "I would have acted in exactly the same way."

While the weeks following the armistice in France had brought an increasing improvement in the atmosphere for Germany, the opposite development was apparent on the other side of the Rhine. Not among the people. The German population continued to show great sympathy for the French. They were so friendly towards the French prisoners of war that Reich Propaganda Minister Goebbels and Dr. Ley felt it necessary to have posters

with the inscription "Enemy remains enemy" put up in railroad stations, factories and public buildings. This was not, as Clemenceau, rechristened "Pere de la Victoire" to "perd la victoire" after the armistice of 1918, found reason to remark, "the drunkenness of a people who had been driven mad by victory".

But in the leading circles of National Socialist Germany, a clear parting of the ways took place after the French campaign. Those who had only reluctantly gone along with the policy of understanding since 1934 now dropped the mask and openly reaffirmed the radical theses of "Mein Kampf". They declared that France had always been an irreconcilable opponent of the Reich, whether kingdom, empire or republic. Even a government led by Marshal Petain would not change this inborn hatred of Germany that the French had inherited for generations. Germany would therefore have to impose a peace on defeated France that would once and for all prevent it from challenging the empire's natural rights to life. After having crushed, economically impoverished and territorially mutilated Germany through the peace dictate of 1919, France had entered into a new war twenty years later with the same intention. It must now be repaid in kind. The military security of the Reich required a border that ran much further west than the Franco-German border of 1871. The claims of Italy and Spain to territories of the French motherland and colonial empire also had to be satisfied.

These advocates of a peace of force, who were strongly represented in the Führer's personal circle, in the high offices of the party and in some staffs of the Wehrmacht, were opposed in all civilian and military departments by supporters of a peace of understanding. They were far more numerous, but rarely more influential. In their view, the Treaty of Versailles had proved to be such a misconstruction, even for the victors, that it did not deserve to be imitated. With a sympathetic treatment of the occupied territory and a generous peace offer, it should be possible to overcome the concept of hereditary enmity in France as well.

These advocates of a course of understanding were not encouraged in their efforts when, from the beginning of July onwards, more and more reports were received by the Führer's headquarters and the French government about the poor treatment that German prisoners of war had received during the Western campaign. Field Marshal Keitel issued the order to treat the French prisoners of war who had fallen into German hands accordingly. However, as their number exceeded two million, this order from the Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht was likely to have a very negative political impact on the broad masses of the French people. As soon as I became aware of this order, I therefore proposed that no reprisals be taken against the French prisoners of war as a whole, but that only the French police and military authorities responsible for the mistreatment of German prisoners of war be brought to justice.

The German air force had become particularly agitated. Under Paul Reynaud, the French government had issued an order to both the regular army and the civilian formations of the "Gardes territoriales" deployed for security duties in the rear front area not to capture members of the German paratroopers falling into their country, but to kill them without mercy. The order was justified by the fact that the German paratroopers were using Dutch uniforms. This claim was completely unjustified. The German parachute helmet probably differed in shape from the steel helmet of the German land army and "roughly" resembled the Dutch one. However, this fact, like the rest of the uni

form of the German parachute troop was well known to foreign military attachés in Germany from parades in the pre-war period.

A large number of German paratroopers were murdered and severely maltreated as a result of the French government's order, which was contrary to international law. Even several airmen forced to make an emergency landing behind French lines suffered such a fate. Mölders, who was later to become a brilliant bearer, also found himself in this situation but was rescued alive by advancing German troops.

When Mölders heard in the military hospital that the perpetrator in his case had been identified, he interceded on his behalf. He obtained a pardon for the French Territorial Guardsman. If a chivalrous soldier was capable of such a gesture of forgiveness, it was not to be expected from the official authorities. On the orders of Dr. Goebbels, the German press published reports and eyewitness accounts of French crimes against German prisoners of war on the front page every day for several weeks with flaming headlines.

Nothing is so apt to stir up the mood of a population against a neighboring country as atrocities committed in that neighboring country against its citizens and nationals. The extent to which a government causes or tolerates the propagandistic underlining of such atrocities by the organs of public opinion is therefore the surest indicator of whether the government in question wants to improve or worsen relations with the neighboring country in question. The echo given to the poor treatment of German prisoners of war in the German press and on German radio did not indicate that the Reich government wanted to improve relations with France.

However, it would be wrong to assume that this lack of good will characterized the Reich government uniformly and that the advocates of a hard line would necessarily have had the upper hand in it. Rather, the majority of its members tended towards the attitude that was later to prevail in the French government in Vichy, where it was labeled "attentist".

This attitude of "wait and see" was also adopted by Adolf Hitler, a man who was otherwise not exactly conspicuous for his excessive reserve. The author of "Mein Kampf" had relapsed less than some of his old loyalists. However, he showed just as little inclination to commit himself to a constructive policy with France.

Summoned to the Führer's headquarters in Salzburg at the end of July 1940, I was able to personally convince myself of Hitler's indecision on the French question at the Berghof on August 3.

He adopted an understanding attitude on certain points. I succeeded in ensuring that support for Breton separatism was discontinued and that no reprisals of any kind were taken for the poor treatment of German prisoners of war. My objection to excessive play. First of all, it was important to give the embassy the authority it needed for political action. To do this, opponents often had to be temporarily misled in their mistrust and the wind taken out of their sails.

My tactical considerations were similar to those of the Swiss railwayman who wanted to bring the St. Gotthard express train to a halt when it once raced down to Lake Lucerne with increasing acceleration due to a breakdown of all brakes. It was traveling towards the express train, which was already close to derailing, with a locomotive from a valley station, but at the moment of collision it had to be traveling in the same direction and at the same speed to avoid being thrown off the tracks. Once shunted in front of the express train, he

was able to gradually pull the brakes on his intact locomotive. The calculation worked and the catastrophe was averted.

I also had to maneuver my message in front of the German French policy so that my opponents didn't get ahead of me and throw me off the track. Once I had really taken the lead, I was gradually able to apply the brakes. The dynamics of the opposing forces were too strong, the possibilities available to the embassy too weak, for this operation to succeed to the extent I would have liked. However, barely three months after my appointment as ambassador, I managed to bring the "Berchtesgaden Express", which was speeding towards France with ever-increasing demands, to a halt at Montoire station.

The encounter of Montoire

Following its relocation to Vichy and the transfer of powers to Marshal Petain at the beginning of July 1940, the newly formed French government devoted itself primarily to domestic political and administrative issues. Its most urgent tasks were the demobilization of the army and the repatriation of the evacuated civilian population.

The military and economic issues arising from the armistice agreement were negotiated between German and French delegations, which met as the "Armistice Commission" in Wiesbaden. Liaison with the German military administration in Paris was handled by a "General Delegation of the French Government for the Occupied Territories" appointed by Marshal Petain.

After just a few weeks, however, it became clear that a number of issues of extreme importance to the French government could not be resolved either within the framework of the Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden or in the negotiations with the German military administration in Paris. They could only be resolved at the political level and with an improvement in the general atmosphere between the two countries. Even decidedly military questions, such as the size of the armed forces to be released to France to secure its colonial empire or the relaxation of the demarcation line, the reduction of occupation costs and the authorization of the return of the civilian population to the exclusion zones in eastern France and on the Channel coast, could only be satisfactorily clarified in a more favourable political climate and in direct government-to-government discussions. In addition, the invasion of the British Isles and the victorious conclusion of the war by Germany seemed imminent. It was therefore in France's interest to enter into political discussions with the German government before the peace treaty was signed.

For these reasons, the French Deputy Prime Minister and constitutional successor to Marshal Petain, Pierre Laval, asked me at the end of July 1940 to arrange a meeting with the Reich Foreign Minister and, if necessary, with the Führer.

I had not known Laval personally before the war and shared all the reservations that were circulating against him. Although he was not denied an unusual statesmanlike talent, it was soon associated with a fabulous wealth acquired in an obscure way, and then with the excessive agility of his political character. In the circles of the national renewal movements, he was regarded as the prototype of the corrupt parliamentarian who always turned his chicken to the wind.

My reports from the first weeks of the occupation still reflect all these prejudices about Laval. When I got to know him personally, I began to see in the short French Prime Minister with the already legendary white Krawatt one of the greatest politicians of our era and, in any case, its last great truly liberal politician.

As a young man, Laval had been a socialist of the "Blanquist school", which had advocated a non-Marxist, authoritarian socialism in France around the middle of the last century and sympathized with Napoleon III's seizure of power. In the years before the First World War, Laval belonged to the left-wing revolutionary camp, represented anarchists and extreme syndicalists as a lawyer and maintained personal links with Lenin and Trotsky. When Georges Clemenceau wanted to give the young socialist MP the Undersecretariat of the Ministry of the Interior in 1917, Laval turned down the offer and

took part in the Stockholm Peace Conference that took place in the same year. He only separated from his party when it split into a socialist and a communist wing in 1920.

Although this separation earned Laval the title of "renegade" in the ranks of the Marxists, he did not join any other party and maintained complete independence in his subsequent political career. Despite this, he held various ministerial posts from 1925 onwards and also served as head of government three times. In his statesmanlike activities, he proved to be the opposite of an opportunist. While he pushed through the legislation on family support and social insurance against great resistance, he also accepted unpopularity when the French currency situation made it necessary to reduce civil servants' salaries and pensions. In 1936, he resigned from the government when his plan for a peaceful settlement of the Abyssinia conflict, drawn up jointly with the British minister Samuel Hoare, was rejected in London and Paris and the League of Nations in Geneva imposed sanctions on Italy. Laval never forgave England for this thwarting of his foreign policy, and his political stance after the French collapse can probably be explained to a certain extent by this.

In authoritative German circles, Laval was treated with the greatest suspicion throughout the occupation. The slogans circulated against him in foreign propaganda were eagerly echoed. Perhaps the most irritating thing in Berlin was that he could not be accused of concluding the Franco-Soviet agreement of 1935, since the Reich government itself had made a pact with Moscow. Laval also caused the National Socialist racial theorists a lot of headaches, as they were unable to place him under any of the common types of their doctrine. As far as I was concerned, I believed

I was transported to one of the plateaus of the southern Black Forest when I sat opposite the French Prime Minister for the first time. In this area of the mountains, a type of people has asserted itself that was probably not pushed out of the fertile regions into the inhospitable heights by the Alemannic conquerors, but by the Celtic conquerors who preceded them. Tougher and yet more delicate than the inhabitants of lower regions, these people look down on the different goings-on in the valleys with primeval eyes, in which the wisdom of many millennia is concealed, and even today they are instinctively wary of any foreign wanderer who enters their field of vision. However, once the initial unease has subsided and trust has been established, the shyness can give way to an unbreakable friendship that has become rare in the present day. Not unsociable in themselves and quite receptive to the common good, these people are rugged individualists and acting as part of a group is their weak point. When a new farm is built on one of the remote slopes and plateaus of the Black Forest, its builder does not choose a location that offers good access to a village or is the most favorable for cultivating the fields, meadows and forests belonging to the estate; rather, he chooses the geometric location of the greatest possible distance from the nearest farms for his building site.

Had remnants of the same race survived in the inaccessible Auvergne during the storms of the migrations as in the Black Forest? Laval, whose family had lived in this mountain range since time immemorial, bore an astonishing resemblance to them, both in appearance and character. His father lived in the small village of Châteldon in what by rural standards were prosperous circumstances, but thought nothing of attending high schools, so that his son had to force himself to study in the city. Laval nevertheless remained loyal to his Auvergne all his life. When he had achieved sufficient wealth, his

first step was to acquire the small castle in his home village of Châteldon as a residence.

In Paris, too, the Auvergnats form a united community and stick together as tightly as only the Corsicans do. While the latter are involved in the capital's public life as robbers and gendarmes, providing the judiciary with disproportionately large contingents of police officers and delinquents, the Auvergne compatriots are mainly brokers and traders. Their favorite district is Auber- villiers, and their business acumen is said to be such that even Armenians cannot stand up to them. Through all the political vicissitudes, Laval has always remained the elected mayor of Aubervilliers, and it was the Auvergnats whose loans and advice helped him to lay the foundations of a large fortune. Through clever investments and economic foresight - Laval was, for example, the first in France to foresee the importance of radio for business advertising - he then achieved considerable prosperity. Significantly, however, this was not realized until

Laval took offense when he came into sharp conflict with certain parties and powers over the independence of his domestic and foreign policy stance. However, the statesman owed his political independence to the favorable private financial circumstances he had managed to create for himself. Laval's personal lifestyle always remained the simplest imaginable.

It has already been said about Laval that he gave the impression of an autodidact, although he had not only completed his legal but also his scientific university studies with brilliant success and his superior intelligence fascinated all his interlocutors. If this remark means that Laval's judgments about people, things and situations never sounded like cathedrals, but seemed to be taken directly from life, then it hits the mark. The fact that he had studied natural sciences alongside jurisprudence was a guarantee that he did not think exclusively in abstract terms, but was also trained to think in vivid, objective terms. As Prime Minister, the former village boy was still very interested in all farming work, especially cattle breeding. When his colleagues in the Vichy government proclaimed the slogan "Retour à la terre", I had a sneaking suspicion that Laval didn't understand what they actually meant. He was still so attached to the clod that he could not imagine how anyone could ever have shaken the dust off their feet.

For Laval, the fatherland was not a mystical or ideological abstraction, as it was for so many uprooted intellectuals in the cities. His France was made up of a series of very concrete landscapes, within which his native Auvergne occupied the central place and in which, on the coasts and in the fields, in the mines and in the factories, people of flesh and blood, with all their faults and merits, their hardships and joys, wanted to go about their daily work in peace, undisturbed by high-sounding ideological phrases.

Laval also saw international relations not so much from the perspective of abstract concepts as from a purely human point of view and from the perspective of the natural interests of nations. Certainly, as the responsible head of French foreign policy, he had long adhered to the idea of collective security, and if he had made advances to Italy in the Abyssinia conflict, it was only to keep it in the Stresa front against Germany. Although he thus followed his country's diplomatic tradition, he always tried to give it a conciliatory note as far as possible. In 1952, he received Brüning in Paris in a very accommodating manner and endeavored to make the French return visit to Berlin the starting point for a new rapprochement between the two countries. Laval paid this state visit accompanied by Briand, whose posture, facial expression and gestures were to **become** increasingly similar as he grew older. The Moscow Pact of 1935 was undoubtedly in line with the

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of the French policy of encirclement against the Reich; Laval, however, took the threatening edge off his plans and tried to keep the door open for negotiations with Germany. "I did not see a single person in Russia who was still able to laugh properly," he said, looking back on his trip to the Soviet paradise. Laval's character and political views were most clearly reflected in such human observations. He had no fundamental prejudice against any nation, not even against the British, even if he "shared" a sincere antipathy with some British politicians. One of the classic Geneva anecdotes tells how Laval once drove Anthony Eden away from the table at a League of Nations banquet. Overcoming the ingrained mistrust of inland mountain dwellers towards sea fish, the French foreign minister had ordered some outside the menu and cut them up with ordinary knives in front of everyone, only to put his English colleague to flight. Laval had no particular sympathies

for Germany, and he barely concealed his rejection of the National Socialist regime. The only foreign language Laval spoke fluently was Spanish; among foreign political systems, his natural preference was undoubtedly the liberalism of the United States of North America.

This was the man who sat opposite me in my embassy one evening late into the night a few weeks after the French collapse. His journey today from Vichy to Paris, my visitor explained to me by way of introduction, had been the hardest of his life. It was only when he saw the German soldiers on French soil after crossing the demarcation line that he fully realized the extent of France's defeat. However, if he held this state of affairs against anyone, it was not the German soldiers occupying the country, but the criminal politicians who were to blame. He was loyally prepared to accept the consequences of mistakes that neither he nor Marshal Petain had committed. In the interests of his country, he wished to attempt cooperation with the imperial government on French soil. Germany could inflict great damage on France and the French, but could not possibly destroy them. Any abuse of German power would one day turn against the Germans themselves, for all human work was only transitory. The significance of the present historical moment was still insufficiently recognized in both France and Germany. But would an irreconcilable attitude be in Germany's interest after he had offered the Reich government cooperation without ulterior motives for the good of Europe?

I replied to Laval that he knew from his long ministerial activity how little the personal opinion of a head of mission mattered today and what little political freedom of movement remained to him in the age of telegraphy and the telephone, where every action could be controlled from headquarters on an hourly basis. On the basis of his long and extensive political experience, he also knew that every defeated country was prone to the error of change of regime or at least to find more favorable peace conditions by transferring the power of government to new men, an error that the victorious powers would never have the right to correct. In my opinion, the most severe punishment that could be inflicted on statesmen guilty of wars would be to force them to represent their country to the enemy occupying power after their defeat. Instead, this thankless task always fell to men like him, Laval, who were certain that they had not wanted the war and had tried everything to end it politically after it broke out. Unaware of the reception he would receive at the Führer's headquarters and from the Reich government, I asked him to regard his visit as unofficial and not to issue a press communiqué about it. However, I promised him that I would report to my government immediately. I would also take this opportunity to emphasize the urgency of the various practical issues he had raised, such as the problem of prisoners of war, food supplies for the civilian population and the restoration of French administrative unity between the unoccupied and occupied territories. It seemed almost impossible to make up the ground lost since the war in the area of Franco-German understanding, but he could count on my help as far as I was able.

This initial contact between Laval and the embassy subsequently led to a progressive rapprochement between the two sides. The French Prime Minister's intentions in initiating the political talks were clear to me. He wanted to achieve relief for his country in the occupation statute during the armistice regime and create a more favorable platform for France in the peace treaty by emphasizing the will to cooperate. His main concern was to preserve the territorial unity of his homeland. In order to save it, he was prepared to give far-reaching moral guarantees. The Franco-German problem at this time was similar to the

one before the war, only the roles had been reversed. From 1919 to 1939, the aim was to convince France that no article of the Treaty of Versailles and no fortification of the Maginot Line could guarantee French security as effectively as a voluntary recognition of the natural rights to life of the German people. It would have built something in the hearts of the Germans that could protect France more strongly than fortifications of iron and concrete - the will to live in peace and friendship with the neighbor across the Rhine. Now, in 1940, it was up to Germany not to make the same mistake as France in 1919 and impose a new Versailles on the defeated nation with the opposite sign. Even the most far-reaching power-political (larantien did not offer the long-term guarantee for the security of the Reich in the West that lay in the justification of a policy of good neighborliness with France.

I)HN, of course, meant renouncing many of the prejudices and rights that the victorious western campaign had brought the empire. The victory over France

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However, it was too great and too surprising in its speed for the German rulers to exchange the positions they had won with it for moral guarantees and to offer the defeated a hand in alliance.

As for me personally, according to reports from third parties, I don't seem to have shared the euphoria of this mood of victory.

The later ambassador to Italy, Rudolf Rahn, who was assigned to my staff by the Foreign Office a few weeks after the armistice and soon took up one of the most important positions in it, describes our first conversation when he took up his post in the Paris embassy in his memoirs with the following words:

"After about half an hour, the hesitant mistrust on both sides had faded and Abetz expressed his view, which was highly rebellious by Berlin standards, with calm candor: Since Dunkirk, he said, he no longer believed in a swift and total German victory. Time was working against us, since the American president was obviously determined to prevent a British defeat at all costs, and since Bolshevik Russia would hardly miss the favorable opportunity to get rid of the inconvenient founder of the Anti-Comintern Pact. In addition, Hitler had declared war on almost all the spiritual and material powers of the world at the same time with a tragically one-sided fanaticism. Thus Germany today faces a more or less closed front of Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Freemasonry, big finance, democracy and communism. He was convinced that the only chance of breaking through this front was a genuine and radical understanding with France. If the world recognized that a France defeated by Germany would be invited to participate as an equal partner in the reconstruction of Europe, that it would not be dismembered or deprived of its colonial possessions and would retain its full independence, then it would also stop seeing Germany only as a troublemaker and eternally threatening militarist. And if Germany wanted to come to an acceptable compromise peace with England, then only through the mediation of France and at best under the pressure of a threatening Franco-German alliance."

I find similar statements in French publications. In "Et Paris ne fut pas détruit", Pierre Taittinger, then President of the Conseil Municipal of Paris and member of the Chamber, mentions a conversation in the embassy that had taken place shortly after the occupation of the French capital about the release of the members of the Paris City Council who had been taken prisoners of war by the Germans. On that occasion, he was amazed at how little

enthusiasm I expressed about the general situation. "Far from indulging in the victory frenzy that prevailed in German circles at the time, Abetz gave me a rather pessimistic picture of the situation and explained that the war could last several more years. England would gradually take it to a number of other theaters of war, and what the end result would be could not be predicted."

I also seem to have had my own thoughts about the Führer's irresistible genius at this time of general enthusiasm, as the following statement to Laval on July 23, 1940, recorded in an official French report, shows: "A part of the Germans - explained Abetz - believes that Hitler is completely infallible, another part thinks that the Führer could be wrong one day. But since events have so far always proved Hitler right, the number of critical minds is steadily decreasing, and none of them has yet gone as far as opposition."

What had shaken my confidence in the Führer's political and military foresight was his indecision in the face of the most urgent problems facing the German war effort in France and the French colonial empire. "I will give Petain and Laval the opportunity to talk when I come to France anyway," was his dilatory reply when I conveyed to him the request of the French head of state and the French deputy prime minister for government-to-government talks to begin as soon as possible.

While Hitler thus remained inactive and left the French question in limbo, England was not idle and began to harness the French colonial empire piece by piece for its war effort.

The attempt made immediately after the armistice to seize Syria with the help of Colonel Larminat had failed. It also had to postpone its political and military plans in French North Africa when the supreme command in this area was transferred to General Weygand, who was very hostile to Germany but loyal to Vichy.

England sought to gain a foothold in French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa with all the more determination. The fact that the English and Gaullist forces, in their advance from the coast to the Sudan, took the same route that had led the French expeditionary force of Captain Marchands to Faschoda half a century earlier could give rise to reflections on the vicissitudes of the history of nations.

On August 23, 1940, the uprising broke out in the Chad region under the political leadership of Pleven and with the support of Governor Eboue. England provided financial aid and had half of the pay paid out in pounds sterling and half in francs. The officers, non-commissioned officers and men who remained loyal to the government in Vichy were expelled from the colony without further ado.

On August 27, Captain Leclerc, coming from Nigeria, landed in Duala with 2 followers and appointed himself Commissioner General of Cameroon. The governor, General Brunot, who had wavered between loyalty to Petain and the threats of the English governor of Nigeria mixed with promises, was arrested.

On August 28, the uprising spread to Brazzaville. It was led by Surgeon General Sicre and Colonel Larminat, who had escaped from Beirut to Leopoldville after the failure of his plans in Syria. The Governor General, General Husson, was taken into custody, maltreated with flask blows and taken in a boat from Brazzaville to Leopoldville.

After a war council held on September 21 between Admiral Cunningham, General Irvin, General Spears and General de Gaulle in Freetown, the Anglo-Gaullist attack on Dakar took place on September 23. The British fleet consisted of two battleships, four cruisers, an aircraft carrier and six destroyers. The Gaullist naval units deployed were the colonial aviso "Savorgnan de Brazza", the submarine chasers "Commandant-Dounzie" and "Commandant-Duboc" and the torpedo destroyers "Vaillant" and "Viking". The tanks and

the Gaullist land troops were accommodated on Dutch ships; General de Gaulle himself was on board the "Westerland".

The attack against the town defended by Governor Boisseau was repulsed thanks to the battleship "Richelieu" lying in the harbor, which was not maneuverable but whose artillery had retained its full firepower. As General Darlan once told me personally, the "Richelieu" had fired its last shell at the moment the attacking squadron turned away. If the battle had lasted just a few minutes longer, Dakar's fate would have been sealed.

The colony of Gabon under Governor Masson defended itself no less heroically, but with less success. On the Vichy side, 450 Europeans and 15,000 Coloreds fought with only a few machine guns, two mortars, three airplanes and - for coastal protection - the Aviso "Bougainville", the submarine "Poncelet" and two tugboats. The Gaullist forces consisted of seven infantry battalions, several artillery sections and three transport companies. They had twenty anti-aircraft guns and a large number of airplanes and cannons; the British had taken over the supply. According to the plan drawn up by de Gaulle, Leclerc and König in Duala, Leclerc was to march on Libreville, while Thierry d'Argenlieu blockaded the colony at sea with the "Savorgnan de Brazza".

The attack on Lambarene began on October 13. The jungle settlement, where Albert Schweitzer had established his great philanthropic work of peace, was bombarded and shelled by the attackers for several weeks, and the hospital of the Catholic nurses was not spared.

On November 9, the Aviso "Bougainville" was put out of action by the "Savorgnan de Brazza". Thierry d'Argenlieu said to a frigate captain of the "Bougainville" lying on the ground with a shattered leg: "My contempt for your person is greater than my pity for your condition." On the submarine "Poncelet", Corvette Captain de Saucine refused to leave Boid and went down with his ship.

At 10. November Libreville fell after heroic resistance. Its defender, Governor Masson, a general, four colonels, two majors, seven captains, sixteen lieutenants, three non-commissioned officers, two naval officers, four mates and numerous civilian administrators and colonists were interned in barges with closed hatches in the tropical climate. Governor Masson, who was held prisoner on the "Savorgnan de Brazza", was found hanged in his dungeon on November 16.

England had usurped the law of action in Africa and Hitler had allowed irretrievable months to pass unused. The Reich government did nothing to support Marshal Petain's government, which was under attack from the same enemy, by making political concessions. What the German Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden conceded to the French colonial forces in terms of minor rearmament was largely nullified by the Italian Armistice Commission in Turin with its demands for disarmament.

It was only after Dakar that Hitler slowly began to consider a Franco-German approach to the defense of North Africa. Even then, he vacillated between cooperation with France and cooperation with Spain, which were mutually exclusive, as Spain had claims to French Morocco. However, given the low level of compensation expected from Spain, cooperation with France seemed more beneficial to him.

The Montoire meeting took place exactly four months after the Compiègne armistice came into force. However, it is characteristic of Hitler's wavering attitude that he did not come to France specifically to meet with the French government. The Franco-German meeting took place as part of a trip to the Spanish border, and between the meetings with Laval and

Pétain on October 22 and 24 in Montoire, Hitler conferred with Franco in Hendaye on October 23.

Even in his day, Montoire gave rise to as many versions and interpretations as there were nuances between collaborators, anti-collaborators and assassins in France and Germany. For some, Hitler's meeting with Pétain was the great turning point in German-French history, for others it was a complete failure. Ribbentrop testified at Nuremberg that Hitler was disappointed with the outcome; a confidant of Pétain even believed that he had to speak of Montoire as a "Verdun diplomatique" in his defense. Pétain's opponents, however, accused him of having betrayed France at Montoire and of having undignifiedly thrown Hitler to the curb with the "policy of cooperation" proclaimed there.

Neither the one nor the other evaluation is completely true, political agreements are no different from leading conferences.

Business people. Each counterparty seeks to protect its own interests and to determine without prejudice in which areas the interests are aligned, because only deals that benefit both parties are good. Uncertain factors that are difficult to take into account are any changes in the general economic situation; but here too, the common interest may dictate that they be dealt with jointly.

In addition to the great practical benefits that could accrue to Germany and France from Montoire, the friendly meeting between the victor and the vanquished four months after the end of a bloody campaign also had a great symbolic significance that should not be underestimated in political life. "Hitler was making a gesture" - as Laval remarked after Montoire - "for which there was no precedent." Such an idea - added the French Prime Minister - had not occurred to Mr. Poincaré, and French public opinion would probably not have been ready for such a policy at the time. Now, however, one could hope that the generosity and wisdom of statesmen would succeed in ending a centuries-old conflict and bring about a situation in which the peoples could draw breath again and make happier plans for the future.

On the German side, too, the greatest hopes were pinned on Hitler's meeting with Pétain. On the car journey from Paris to Montoire, I took the opportunity to speak to the Army High Command in Fontainebleau to inform Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, Colonel General Halder and Quartermaster General Wagner of the forthcoming meeting. "If Hitler and Marshal Pétain succeed in establishing a good, lasting understanding between our two peoples," the German army leaders told me, "no one will be happier about it than we soldiers. It is often said of the military that they are bellicose. But we, who know what it means to send thousands of young people to their deaths, know war too well not to love peace."

Hitler himself seemed to have brought good dispositions with him to Montoire. "You are the stronger ones," Laval told him in their first conversation on October 22, "you can crush us. We will take the suffering upon us, we will endure it, but one day we will rise up against you again, that is an eternal law of nature. You have beaten us, but we have also beaten you in the past. If you humiliate us, I do not know when and under what conditions the drama between us will begin anew. We have already pinned enough victories to our banners. But if, on the contrary, you offer us a just peace that takes our honor and our interests into account, anything is possible. "My peace will not be a peace of revenge," was Hitler's reply.

At the meeting between Hitler and Pétain, however, a little of what can happen when the first meeting between two pronounced one-track minds finally comes about through a

marriage broker took place.

has been brought. The mediator discreetly withdraws and leaves the future couple alone on a bench in the park. But neither partner finds the decisive word. There may be a declaration of love - not too stormy - but the binding promise of marriage still needs to be considered. Talking about the dowry and the morning gift would be prosaic at such a difficult time anyway. Besides, you don't even know yet what your mutual relatives - in our case they lived across the Channel and the Alps - would say about the new union.

Since the request for the meeting had come from Petain, Hitler probably assumed that the French head of state would speak first. Petain, however, seemed to expect the same from Hitler and thought it was in the order of things that the master of the Third Reich should be the first to put his cards on the table. Added to this was the lack of a written agenda, which would have been essential simply because of Marshal Petain's age. Nor was it possible to prepare the debate diplomatically because of the strict military secrecy regulations. Apart from the fact that I had not received any political instructions from the Reich government, I was only allowed to inform Laval on the way to Montoire that he would be meeting not only the Reich Foreign Minister but also the Führer. I had to catch up with Marshal Petain in Tours. It was also not possible to have a preparatory political discussion with him during the purely protocolary ceremony of greeting and on the subsequent short journey to Montoire.

When Petain's car arrived in front of Montoire station, an honorary battalion of the Wehrmacht presented arms to the Marshal of France. Hitler met him on the station square and shook his hand. He then personally led the guest through the station building onto the platform to the special train in whose saloon car the meeting was taking place. I don't know what impression the Führer made on Petain. Hitler was visibly moved to find himself face to face with the victor of Verdun. The appearance of the French head of state, who came from a farming family in the Pas de Calais department, was too much in keeping with the Third Reich's Nordic racial ideal not to win him the sympathy of the assembled National Socialists by storm; the taut military bearing of the over eighty-year-old Marshal of France was too exemplary not to earn him the admiration of the members of the German Wehrmacht present just as quickly.

The discussion, which was attended by Hitler and Petain as well as Ribbentrop and Laval, lasted several hours and took place in a very friendly atmosphere.

As was his custom, Hitler opened the conversation with a historical remark. He had offered France peace, and the latter had declared war on Germany for no reason. The main enemy of Germany and the real enemy of the war, however, was England, over which the Reich was in the midst of its armament - Hitler did not fail to give details about this. He would soon win the final victory. If England proposed a compromise peace beforehand, he could not expect the German people to make additional sacrifices just to spare France. For the costs of this war were monstrous, and someone would have to pay; after the victory of the Axis powers, peace would be concluded either on the back of England or on the back of France. France had the choice. It could wait indecisively for the end of hostilities and hope that Germany would be exhausted, or it could resist English temptations and secure its rightful place in the new Europe by vigorously defending its colonial possessions in Africa.

In his reply, Petain - supported by Laval - first emphasized that the French people did not want this war either and had only reluctantly followed the bad shepherds who had led them into it. The new French government wanted to find a relationship of good neighborliness with Germany and cooperate with it to a large extent. France was also

determined to defend its overseas possessions with the utmost energy, but as a result of its defeat and the armistice agreement, it lacked the armaments and military freedom of movement essential for an effective fight against England. Hitler had spoken of German blood flowing in Europe, Laval added, emphasizing that Africa was soaked in French blood and was sacred ground for France.

Hitler recognized that the French fleet had fought with great bravery against the British attackers. France's position as a colonial power in Africa should remain undisputed even in peace. However, this would require the French government not only to oppose all further British attacks with the utmost determination, but also to re-establish its sovereignty in the colonies in Central Africa taken from it by the Gaullists.

Hitler did not demand -- as has often been claimed in commentaries on Montoire -- that France declare war on Britain. He only demanded - to use Laval's own words - that France "join a European coalition against England and make military contributions in Africa within its framework."

This is also clear from the protocol drawn up after the discussion between Petain and Laval, which was to be signed by the interested governments after Italy had reached an agreement.

"Conscious of the overriding continental interests of the leading powers of Europe" - it says in this protocol - "and with reference to the meeting held on October 24, 1940 between the Führer of the German Reich and the Head of the French State, Germany, Italy and France reach the following agreement:

1. In agreement with the Duce, the Führer expressed the will to give France its rightful place in the new European order and your French people the right to the cooperation of the European peoples that is indispensable for the future.

2. The Axis Powers and France have a common interest in ensuring that England's defeat occurs as quickly as possible. Consequently, the French Government will, as far as possible, support the measures taken by the Axis Powers to this end. The details of this practical cooperation will be laid down in a special agreement between Germany and Italy on the one hand and France on the other.

3. On this condition, Germany and Italy are prepared to grant France certain reinforcements for the execution of its military measures in Africa, which exceed the Armistice Agreement and the agreements reached in its execution. The details in this respect will be settled by the Armistice Commissions with the French delegations.

4. The Führer explained to the French head of state that after the defeat of England and the return of the German colonies in the peace treaty, a general reorganization of colonial ownership on the African continent would also have to be undertaken. This would have to take account of the political necessities and economic requirements of the European nations involved, taking mutual interests into consideration. The four powers of Germany, Italy, France and Spain were the main candidates for this distribution. Should this reorganization in Africa necessitate changes in the present French colonial possessions, the Axis Powers will undertake, when peace is concluded with England, to compensate France territorially in such a way that the future French colonial possessions in Africa will, taken as a whole, correspond to their present value."

What is remarkable about this protocol is that in the preamble France - four months after its defeat - is counted among the "leading" European powers alongside Germany and Italy.

It should also be emphasized that the Reich did not want to disadvantage Italy in any way by cooperating with France. If Italy insisted on its claim to Tunis, France was to be compensated with English colonial possessions - Nigeria, Freetown and Bathurst were in mind. The last article of the protocol also made its entry into force dependent on Italy's consent. "The Imperial Government", this article stipulated, "undertakes to assure itself immediately of the agreement of the Italian Government to the above-mentioned points and to request it to give effect to the Protocol on its part."

In Rome, however, such loyalty to the Nibelung on the part of the Axis partner did not seem to be considered possible, and the surprising news of the Franco-German meeting caused lively resentment. The Reich had taken such an important step without prior agreement from Italy. Italy would not owe it an answer and would take an important step without

prior consultation with the Reich. On the way home from Montoire, Hitler received the news while still on French soil that the Duce had given the order to attack Greece. The Führer's special train immediately changed direction and traveled to Florence, where Hitler wanted to try to dissuade Mussolini from his plan. The special train of the Reich Foreign Minister, which was already on the track from Montoire to Paris during the night, where the general talks between Ribbentrop and Laval that had begun were to be concretized the following day, also turned around and hurried after the Führer's train. As the Italian attack on Greece had far-reaching consequences for Axis policy throughout the Balkans, Ribbentrop's attention was completely diverted from France in the coming weeks by this issue. The meeting between the Reich Foreign Minister and the French Prime Minister was therefore repeatedly postponed. By the time Ribbentrop was finally able to dispose of his time in mid-December 1940 and wanted to start negotiations with Laval, this had become a moot point due to domestic political events that had occurred in Vichy in the meantime.

Palace revolution in Vichy

In a retrospective report on Franco-German relations since the armistice, which I wrote for Hitler in the summer of 1943, I wrote that "the sabotage of Montoire began on the day of Montoire itself" and that "in this sabotage Englishmen, Italians, Frenchmen and Germans competed with each other".

It went without saying that the British would do everything in their power to prevent the Franco-German cooperation initiated at Montoire. The Mediterranean was one of the most important lifelines of the British Empire, and if the British bases and naval forces in this area were practically blockaded, Fortress Europe had to be regarded as unassailable on its southern front as well. If, however, England wanted to engage in active warfare against the Axis powers at all, it had to start at their weakest point - Italy. Undertakings against the Apennine Peninsula as well as preparatory operations against the Italian colonial possessions in Abyssinia and Libya required that the British armies in Central and North Africa had their backs and flanks covered. Britain's military and political warfare was therefore just as concerned with preventing the inclusion of these areas in the Axis defense system as it was with gaining a foothold in these areas itself.

The British government pursued these two goals with a tenacity and consistency that I would have wished for the Imperial government in its countermeasures. While the British-Gaullist forces took control of one French colony after another, London simultaneously initiated diplomatic negotiations with Vichy via Samuel Hoare in Madrid in order to provide political cover for its military actions. Skilfully using the leverage she had in her hand by maintaining the blockade between the French colonial empire and metropolitan France, which was suffering from great food shortages, England had Marshal Petain assure her that she had no intention of attacking or annexing France's overseas possessions, but that she could not guarantee that spontaneous uprisings against Vichy would not break out in these territories. If France gave a binding assurance that it would withdraw both its motherland and its colonial empire from any influence of the Axis powers, a relaxation of the blockade imposed on France at sea could be considered; support for de Gaulle's movement could be ruled out.

and the French colonial territories that had converted to de Gaulle could not, however, be relinquished by Great Britain. If the French government "attacked de Gaulle by force of arms", this would "almost inevitably" lead to a conflict with Britain.

For its part, the French government declared that it had never undertaken attacks against English ships or territories and did not intend to do so in the future. However, it would defend itself against any attack and, with regard to the independence of the fleet and the colonial empire, would adhere to the rights granted to it in the armistice agreement. Moreover, it would endeavor to establish a *modus vivendi* with England for merchant shipping between the French colonial empire and the mother country.

These negotiations, which had begun at the end of August 1940, were not interrupted by the attack on Dakar, and on October 21, three days before Montoire, the British government expressed the wish to continue and intensify them. The line pursued was obvious. England claimed the right to support British-Gaullist attacks against French colonial possessions. At

best, the French government had the right to defend itself against these attacks; however, any attempt to regain territories that had been seized from it constituted a hostile act against Great Britain, which the latter would regard as *casus belli*. Given the limitations imposed on the French forces by the armistice and the growing resources of the British Empire, this unilateral procedure would soon lead to all French colonies, including the strategically important French North Africa, being in British hands.

Montoire was now threatening to upset this British calculation. Even if the policy of cooperation did not in the least affect the independence of the French fleet and the French colonial empire, an atmosphere of trust between Germany and France had to result in the liberation of the French colonial army and fleet from the shackles of the armistice treaty. England then had to prepare itself for increased resistance by the French colonial empire against British-Gaullist attacks and for the protection of French merchant shipping by the French navy. It was known that Petain considered it incompatible with his honor to declare war on his former ally, and that Laval detested any acts of war too much to wish for them of his own accord. But it was also known that Petain was determined to restore the unity of the French colonial empire and to expel de Gaulle from the territories that had revolted. Even if Laval lacked a similar sense of "empire", it was certain that he would not contradict Petain in these intentions, if only out of a desire to improve France's relations with Germany, but on the contrary would encourage him in them. If the Empire put the French government in a position militarily to assert its sovereignty in the territories disputed by it, it would not be able to do so.

England was faced with a dilemma. It either had to abandon its operational plans in Africa and the Mediterranean or enter a war that was declared not by France but by England itself.

The news of the meeting between Hitler and Petain in Montoire therefore hit London like a thunderclap. Churchill's first reaction was to have Vichy bombed by the Royal Air Force. But the British government opted for the carrot. The King sent Petain a personal message in which Great Britain solemnly renewed Churchill's declaration, made during the Armistice, that the integrity of French territory should be preserved and that France should share in England's victory. On British state radio, the polemics against Marshal Petain fell so conspicuously silent that General de Gaulle felt alarmed, especially as his own reputation in London had suffered since the failure of the Dakar operation. The English propaganda attacked Laval all the more vehemently, and it was not without reason that he was seen as the driving force behind Montoire. England was not lacking in personalities in Vichy either, who took it upon themselves to drive a wedge between the French head of state and the French deputy prime minister. At the same time, there was a noticeable easing of the English blockade. French ships never passed through Gibraltar and the barrier around Bordeaux more freely than in the days and weeks following the Montoire encounter.

By seeking to neutralize the political and military effects of Montoire in this way, Great Britain was acting in its well-understood national interest. It did not want to miss out on the platform and springboard for its planned operations against Italy. For this very reason, however, it was all the more incomprehensible that Italy left no stone unturned to sabotage the policy initiated in Montoire. While Mussolini's sudden decision to attack Greece, as mentioned above, was only indirectly connected with the meeting between Hitler and

Pétain on October 24, it had the direct consequence that the negotiations between Ribbentrop and Laval, which had been scheduled for October 25 in Paris and were intended to concretize the agreement, were postponed and ultimately did not take place at all. Although in a more hidden form, Roman policy and propaganda worked no less against Franco-German rapprochement than London's policy and propaganda. It was particularly successful in that it fanned and kept alive mistrust of France among the leading figures of the Third Reich beyond what was justified. Nothing characterized the attitude of the Italian government better than the fact that, on the day after Montoire, it sent a sharp note to the French armistice delegation in Turin demanding the immediate dismantling of the defences of the naval bases at Oran and Bizerta. After the failure that Great Britain had suffered in Dakar only a month earlier, and given the disruptive effects that the Montoire's policy could have on British operational plans in the Mediterranean and North Africa, London could sincerely congratulate itself on such a blatant "concession" by Rome.

In Germany, Montoire divided opinion even more than before. The supporters of a peace of understanding believed that the debate between Hitler and Pétain had laid the foundations for a constructive policy between the two countries. The supporters of a peace by force, however, doubled and tripled their efforts to undermine such a policy psychologically and practically.

At certain intervals, the Paris embassy received copies of news and reports on the mood in France from third countries via the courier of the Foreign Office. In the weeks following Montoire, these reports, which arrived from the most distant capitals and parts of the world, uniformly contained the message that "80% of the French population were Gaullists". I took the liberty of drawing Ribbentrop's and Hitler's attention to the regular recurrence of this figure, which obviously betrayed a secret government. Even if the percentage of Gaullists was at such a high level, the reports should have alternately put it at 70% or 90%. But my objection went unheard, and the "80% Gaullists" were a foregone conclusion for Hitler, and therefore also for Ribbentrop. Their conclusion from this was, of course, that cooperation with France lacked any moral guarantee.

The embassy took the view that the great mass of the French population, like that of any country, was at all times relatively uninterested in questions of major politics and was primarily concerned with its material concerns, which were particularly great during the occupation. A small active majority of anti-collaborators was opposed by a by no means smaller, but also numerically very insignificant minority of collaborators, while the vast majority of the people as well as the government and administration tended towards assassination. It depended very much on the practical behavior of the victorious power and the handling of the occupation regime which of these tendencies would ultimately gain the upper hand. I did not fail to point out to Hitler the mistakes made in this respect by the Führer's headquarters and the Reich government.

"The behavior of the English at Dunkirk and Mers-el-Kebir," I remarked in the report already quoted, "and the exemplary attitude of the German soldiers, which contrasted with it, caused a change of mood among the French people that would have made a change of alliances possible. This change of mood did not last long. For many French people, the collapse had come too suddenly to trigger an inner change beyond the immediate shock effect. The fact that the German landing in England did not take place could still raise hopes

of a change in the fortunes of war. The transportation of French prisoners of war to camps in Germany, which was not carried out by German military

The dismantling of numerous branches of French production as a result of the war, the complete change in the tone of the German press and German radio towards France since the victory, and the separation of the northern departments and the exclusion zone from the rest of the occupied territory made the French realize that - contrary to the assurances of German propaganda - the war against England was also a war against France. Nevertheless" - my report emphasizes - "there were still sufficient conditions in the autumn of 1940 to establish a constructive policy with Germany in France."

In a report dated October 8, 1940, I drew Berlin's attention to the fact that "the weak point of the French government lies in the lack of an organic connection with the broad masses of the people, which could take the place of the former personal connections of the deputies with the voters of their constituency". "The introduction of food rationing with its completely inadequate allocations and the ever-increasing unemployment," I explained in the same report, "have very detrimental consequences for us in terms of sentiment, as the blame for the shortage of food and raw materials is attributed exclusively to the requisitions of the German occupation authorities." - "If the masses of unemployed, whose numbers are growing daily as a result of the confiscation of raw materials and machinery, are not given the hope of later re-employment in other branches of production, they will invariably be driven into the arms of communism."

These warnings, issued two weeks before the Montoire meeting, did not receive the attention from the Reich government that they deserved. After Montoire, the German press and German radio became increasingly friendly towards France again, and they did not fail to give the historic meeting between the Führer and Marshal Petain the propaganda it deserved. In the area of economic measures, however, there was a clear stiffening after Montoire. The intention to sabotage the policy initiated in Montoire may have played a lesser role than the desire to get as many of the material assets intended for the German economy out of the occupied territory as possible before this policy took effect. After the Western campaign, the Reich government had a plan drawn up according to which France was to reimburse Germany during the armistice and in the peace treaty for the equivalent value of the payments and deliveries that Germany had made and transferred to France on the basis of the armistice of 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles. With the policy proclaimed in Montoire, however, the relationship between victor and vanquished could not remain as it had been after the Second Armistice of November 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles. November 1918 and after the Treaty of Versailles. It therefore seemed to certain Beiliner economic authorities that the implementation of their plans was m'lankreich urgent.

It cost the embassy a great deal of effort and time to ward off these attacks and to arouse understanding for their damaging psychological and political effects in France. On November 7, 1940, exactly 14 days after Montoire, Reichsmarschall Göring demanded the declaration and delivery of the foreign currency and gold holdings deposited in French banks and expressed the wish that the relevant decree of the military commander be issued in the shortest possible time. Although this decree would not have been contrary to the Hague Regulations and the Armistice Agreement, I opposed it on the grounds that it would "worsen the mood of the French population to an intolerable degree". I succeeded in having the measure postponed for the time being, and subsequently France remained the only

occupied territory where it did not come into force.

The question of dismantling brought me into direct conflict with Göring. As head of the four-year plan, he had ordered the removal of important machinery from French heavy industry plants and confronted me during a visit to Paris in mid-November 1940, as his military representatives had no longer complied with these orders due to my political objections. In a conversation at the Hotel Ritz, Göring attacked me very vehemently, but I seemed to have succeeded in convincing him of my arguments. In any case, the dismantling work was finally stopped in the course of the following weeks, and by shifting German orders to France, the French unemployed, estimated at one million in November 1940, were soon all fully employed again.

If the dismantling ordered by Göring extended to machines that were used for the production of war material and could therefore fall under the disarmament provisions of the Armistice Agreement, other such measures and projects could not be justified on the basis of military interests. Rather, they were the efforts of the occupying powers, which had become a tradition since Versailles, to exploit their victorious position to curb unwelcome competition in the defeated country. In November 1940, Dr. Goebbels, in agreement with Dr. Ley, instructed the propaganda department of the military commander in France to stop Parisian fashion from coming up, as Berlin was to become the European fashion center on Hitler's orders. Corresponding directives were issued with regard to French filmmaking.

"The result of our victorious struggle," stated a directive from the Ministry of Propaganda sent to Paris on November 28, 1940 - one month after Montoire I - "must be the breaking of the dominance of French cultural propaganda in Europe and in the world. After the capture of Paris, the center of French cultural propaganda, it is possible to strike a decisive blow against it. Any toleration of French cultural propaganda and any support given to it would be a crime against the nation." Despite the final sentence of this instruction,

With this barely veiled threat, the embassy immediately put up an energetic front against Goebbels' plans. "German fashion," I explained in a report to Berlin, "could not achieve international recognition through the temporary, mechanical and violent suppression of French fashion, but only through an increase in the creative spirit and artistic taste of German fashion itself." - Through a personal presentation to Hitler, I succeeded in having the instructions of Dr. Goebbels and Dr. Ley reversed. In the following years, French film production even took on a quantitative and qualitative development that it had not known before the war, and Parisian fashion was also able to maintain an almost peacetime operation during the entire occupation.

The "dismantling" of Parisian film studios and fashion salons in isolated cases in November 1940 and the temporary ban on leading French fashion magazines nevertheless had a serious psychological impact at the time they took place, as these were branches of production that enjoyed particular popularity among all social classes. If the Reich propaganda minister's intention had been to make the "policy of cooperation" unpopular in France, the time and means were not badly chosen.

However, Gauleiter Bürckel undoubtedly set the record in the sabotage of Montoire on the German side. If his colleague, Gauleiter Sauckel, earned a monument to the French maquis for his mass recruitment for the resistance movement in France, Gauleiter Bürckel should have been awarded the Military Cross for the expulsions from Lorraine immediately

after Montoire. It was above all to his credit that the policy of cooperation in France was psychologically undermined before it could have military consequences in Africa.

As head of the civil administration in Lorraine, which had become part of the Gau Saarpfalz, Bürckel had feared that Montoire would lead to diplomatic negotiations that could lead to him regaining the newly acquired Gau territory. With the egocentricity and self-importance of a German dueling prince of past centuries, he therefore believed he had to thwart the great imperial policy out of his special interest. He had barely heard of the meeting between Hitler and Petain when he ordered the expulsion of the inhabitants of all purely French-speaking villages in Lorraine at the drop of a hat. He wanted to create a fait accompli before the negotiations between the governments began, and the expulsions were carried out with such haste that those affected had no time to obtain certificates for the property they had left behind with a view to later compensation. The only possessions they were allowed to take with them were limited cash and hand luggage.

Gauleiter Bürckel had obtained Hitler's and Ribbentrop's approval for duui's action under false pretenses. He pretended,

The government had given the population the opportunity to choose, and those who had opted for France had been offered the opportunity to resettle in the country of their choice in an accommodating manner. In reality, however, the expulsions were carried out on the basis of arbitrarily drawn up lists. Bürckel also claimed that the French government had itself called on the population of Lorraine loyal to France to resettle via the Bordeaux radio station. Such a procedure would not have seemed unusual in Berlin, as the Reich government had also proceeded in the same way on occasion with the resettlement of Germans from South Tyrol. In reality, however, the Bordeaux radio station was located in occupied territory, and if it had broadcast such an appeal, in which even Marshal Petain's name had been misused, it was not with the knowledge and will of the French government, but at the instigation of the head of the German civil administration in Lorraine.

After ordering his measures, Gauleiter Bürckel came to Paris on November 3, 1940 and informed me that "the trains with the deported Lorrainers will leave for unoccupied France from the evening of that day. The embassy should inform the French government so that reception quarters could be provided. I refused to make any demarche to this effect and made Bürckel aware of the catastrophic political consequences that his measures would inevitably entail. My objections were met with exclamations such as "Did the French or we win the war?" or "Are you still German?" and the Gauleiter slammed the door as he left. He would go on to become one of my bitterest opponents in the NSDAP.

The incident of the deportation of the Lorrainers was the first time I noticed how little open resistance there was in the Third Reich to measures that had met with Hitler's approval, even if these measures were recognized as highly damaging to Germany. The German occupation authorities in France were all opposed to the Lorraine expulsions. At my request, the General of the Air Force tried to persuade Paris Göring to appeal to Hitler, and the commander of the Security Police approached Himmler with the same request. But neither of these influential figures could be persuaded to take the step suggested to them. The supreme commander of the German operational troops in France, whose army area also included Lorraine, Field Marshal von Witzleben, confined himself to sending one of his liaison officers to the German embassy in Paris to convey his concerns about Bürckel's measure to me. General Heinrich von Stülpnagel, who was still in charge of the German

Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden at the time, refused to accept the French government's protest note against the Lorraine expulsions. Ribbentrop, who as Reich Foreign Minister would have had the primary duty to draw Hitler's attention to the disastrous effects of the measures taken by the Chief of the Civil Administration.

m Lorraine, not only adopted Bürckel's point of view, but even officially expressed this agreement. He disregarded the embassy's suggestion that the measure should at least be postponed until it could be carried out in a manner that was in accordance with international law, and forbade me to interfere any further in the matter.

Despite this statement by the Reich Foreign Minister, I flew to Germany by the shortest route after the argument with Bürckel in order to make representations to Hitler directly against the Gauleiter's measure. I succeeded in having the Lorraine expulsions stopped, but only after ten days of waiting in vain for an appointment to speak. During this time, almost fifty thousand of the one hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand deportations planned by Bürckel had already been carried out. The effects in France predicted in the embassy's reports to Berlin were not long in coming.

"The Montoire meeting," Laval had declared on October 31, 1940, in a debate before the heads of the German military and civilian departments in Paris, "has triggered a wave of optimism in France. There is a danger that it will give way to a feeling of disappointment. We know that the disaster caused by the war cannot be made good in its entirety in a few days or weeks, or even in a few years. But that is precisely why it is necessary to show public opinion that the policy of cooperation is at least the beginning of a reconstruction of France. The policy adopted at Montoire must be made known to the public in practical terms. In my opinion, it is particularly urgent to solve the problems of prisoners of war, the demarcation line, the costs of occupation and the Northern Departments under the authority of the military commander in Brussels."

The demands made by Laval in this debate represented the minimum of what the French population had expected in terms of relief from Marshal Petain's meeting with Hitler. However, instead of a mass liberation of prisoners of war, a relaxation of the demarcation line, a reduction in occupation costs and an administrative reintegration of the northern departments, trains carrying expelled Lorrainers arrived after the solemn proclamation of the Montoire policy.

If England had been looking for tens of thousands of fluent French-speaking propagandists spread throughout unoccupied France to oppose the policy of Franco-German cooperation, it would have been impossible to find more suitable ones than those supplied free of charge by Gauleiter Bürckel. The expellees from Lorraine were filled with the deep resentment against Germany that every ethnic group forcibly displaced from their homes and farms harbors against the country responsible for it, and they naturally did not fail to vent this resentment in their new surroundings.

The mood in the occupied territory also deteriorated rapidly. On November 11, 1940, anti-German demonstrations took place on the Champs-Élysées. student riots took place. The military commander then had the Paris University closed, but lifted the ban again following my intervention.

The expulsion of the Lorrainers had the most serious consequences for the French government. After the meeting with Bürckel, the embassy sent a telegram to the Foreign Office informing it that the Gauleiter's measure would mean the fall of Laval in domestic

politics. This prediction was to come true all too soon. While the French cabinet had unanimously approved the talks held by Petain and Laval in Montoire on October 27, 1940, and had declared its support for the principle of cooperation with Germany in a radio and press communiqué, most members of the Vichy government switched to the Attentist camp after the incident with the Lorraine, and Laval found himself increasingly isolated.

A comparison of reports from the Paris embassy on 1 November 1940 shows how excellently the policies of the Gauleiter and the Reich government were synchronized with the military interests of the German war effort in the National Socialist "Führerstaat". Bürckel informed me of the expulsions from Lorraine on the same day that French General Huntziger told me that he was ready to meet with the commanders-in-chief of the French fleet and the French air force to discuss the accelerated implementation of operations against the African colonies that had gone into revolt. On November 1, General de Gaulle gave Colonel Leclerc supreme military command in Chad. He himself had already set up his headquarters in Duala on October 10 and appointed General Larminat as "High Commissioner in Free French Africa".

With the military means at its disposal, Vichy could neither restore its sovereignty in the rebellious areas nor prevent the insurgency from spreading further. It therefore had the French Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden present a note on 2 November demanding the right to substantial reinforcements of the land forces in French North and West Africa, as well as authorization to rearm a larger number of units of the fleet.

On November 4, Hitler declared at a meeting of the general staffs of the three branches of the Wehrmacht in Berlin that "France should take over the protection of its colonies itself and be given a completely free hand in its overseas possessions." The Chief of the Operations Department of the Navy commented that the French fleet could only accomplish its task in the colonial empire with the help of all its units, which were already greatly reduced. It was therefore necessary for the Italians to fundamentally change their position on the question of French disarmament.

While the political discussions scheduled after Montoire were not held at all due to Ribbentrop's absence and the discussions on the economic cooperation only got off to a slow start, the military discussions were actively taken up in the course of November. As the French Minister of War, the French naval chief and the French Deputy Prime Minister wished to conduct these military negotiations in person, they were transferred from Wiesbaden to the embassy in Paris at the beginning of December. The German Armistice Commission and the High Command of the Wehrmacht were represented by General Warlimont. On the agenda were the restoration of the sovereignty of the French government in the rebellious colonies in Central Africa, the departure of the French navy to Dakar and the blockade of the colony of Gabon by French submarines.

On December 9, 1940, the decision was made to complete the French advance against the Chad region in three months and to begin operations against the most important base in this colony, Fort Lamy, on March 1, 1941. Any British military interventions were to be met with French air raids on Gibraltar and British Nigeria as well as French air, sea and land operations against Freetown and Bathurst.

Four days after this meeting, on December 13, 1940, a government crisis broke out in Vichy, which led to the fall of Laval.

At the time, Laval's expulsion from the cabinet was presented by its authors as a purely domestic political event that would not change Franco-German cooperation in the slightest. Today, the same people understandably interpret it as a deliberate break with Montoire's policy in purely foreign policy terms.

In truth, both the one and the other motives were probably equally important. The Vichy "December 13" followed too close in time to the military debate in Paris to suggest any direct connection with it. At the same time as the Franco-German talks in Paris, in which Laval was involved, Anglo-French talks were also taking place in unoccupied territory, in which Petain was particularly interested. According to the statements of the Vichy negotiator - admittedly disputed by Churchill - the Anglo-French talks on December 6 had led to an agreement on the basis of the negotiations begun before Montoire. In this agreement, England had once again guaranteed the integrity of the French overseas possessions as well as the freedom of French shipping and had undertaken to cease the attacks by the British radio against the government of Marshal Petain. The French fleet and colonial army had been granted the right to defend themselves against any attack - from whichever side it came - but at the same time had been made obliged to refrain from offensive operations against the territories transferred to de Gaulle. This point of the "Franco-English agreement" of December 5 would of course not have been compatible with the Franco-German agreement.

agreement of December 9 on the restoration of the French government's sovereignty in Chad, and Petain would therefore have dropped Laval on December 13. This thesis has a lot of probability to it, especially as the victorious British offensive against Libya that had just begun in those days and the Italian defeats in the campaign against Greece seemed to promise a change in the fortunes of war and, on the other hand, the Axis powers themselves had left no stone unturned after Montoire to make it difficult for Marshal Petain to cooperate with them. However, the fact that Laval's successor, Admiral Darlan, was prepared to go much further in terms of military cooperation with Germany than Prime Minister Laval, who was by nature less inclined towards warlike operations, speaks against the foreign policy interpretation of Vichy's "December 13th".

The domestic political motives for Laval's overthrow are therefore likely to have been at least as decisive as the considerations for England. In order to understand the domestic political background to December 13, it is necessary to take a look at the forces and circles that had gained the dominant influence around Marshal Petain in Vichy after the change of regime in the summer of 1940. First and foremost, the "Action Fran^aise" and its leader Charles Maurras should be mentioned.

Charles Maurras is undoubtedly the intellectual leader of the French right who has had the strongest intellectual and political impact in France and beyond its borders in recent decades. Neither Mussolini nor Salazar were unaware of his authoritarian and corporate state ideas, and even General de Gaulle and General Giraud had gone through the school of "Action Fran^aise" despite their participation in the crusade of democracies.

A southern Frenchman from near Marseille, Charles Maurras gave French "integral nationalism" a purely Latin accent. He completely denied France's Celtic and Germanic origins and only recognized the "Greco-Roman" cultural heritage, which he saw not as a contradiction but as a unity. Maurras' religious ideal is the Catholic Church, his political ideal the monarchy. However, the Holy See banned the "Action Frangaise" for "idolizing

the nation", and the legitimate pretender to the crown of France, the Comte de Paris, fell out with his own partisans.

For Charles Maurras, the mortal enemies were Germany and the republican system in France. After the victory of the Wehrmacht and the collapse of the Third Republic, his ambition was to take advantage of the "divine surprise" to purge the country of all democratic elements and republican institutions. Marshal Petain was for him a godsend, since he made possible - as a French royalist, the Clansais, once remarked - the establishment of a "monarchy without a king". It went without saying, however, that Laval, as the constitutionally designated successor to Marshal

Petaín was less to the taste of Action Française. During his state visit to Rome in 1955, Laval had managed to normalize not only the relationship between the Third Republic and the Vatican, but also that of Action Française, and it was ultimately due to his influence that Marshal Petain was granted almost unlimited powers by the National Assembly on 10 July 1940. Nevertheless, the circles that came to power in Vichy saw Laval - not without reason - as the parliamentary politician who wanted to preserve a large part of the institutions of the Republic in the new "Etat Français".

In addition to factual points of contention - such as the abolition of free elections to the municipal parliaments - the personnel issues of appointments also played a role in the dispute between Laval and his domestic political opponents that should not be underestimated, as with every regime change. It was no more than natural that the "defeated" of the Popular Front elections of 1936 offered their services to the new government and administration in large numbers and did not meet with closed doors in Vichy. However, the old personnel of the Third Republic also naturally sought protection from Deputy Prime Minister Laval, who had been close to them for decades of parliamentary work. Marshal Petain's finance minister, Yves Bouthillier, is said to have called the new regime a "revenge for the Dreyfus affair". The "General Delegate of the French Government for the Occupied Territories", General de Fornelle de la Laurencie, who was not aloof from the plot against Laval on December 13, declared to officials at the German Embassy in Paris on December 14: "In the terrible abyss into which we have fallen, there was only one light of hope left - the German victory would free our unfortunate country from the Masonic clique that has led it to ruin. You will therefore understand my surprise when I see that you are placing your trust in the impure politicians who are at the throat of France."

This remark could just as well refer to Laval, about whose fall and its circumstances the embassy of General de Fornelle de la Laurencie had expressed its astonishment, as to the main writer of the Paris "Oeuvre", Marcel Deat, whom General de Fornelle de la Laurencie had had arrested a few hours earlier for an article against Vichy. However, as this article had been approved by the censorship of the military commander and had appeared in occupied territory, its author had to be released immediately.

The incident with Marcel Deat was symptomatic. A left-wing politician and supporter of the "Neo-Socialist Party", he had nevertheless closed his mind to anti-fascist crusading ideologies before the war. As the German-Polish crisis intensified in the summer of 1939 he published a sensational article entitled "Mourir pour Danzig?", in which he warned France against entering the war. After the French collapse, it was therefore natural that he, like his party colleague, the mayor of Bordeaux

Adrien Marquet, moved into his political camp in Vichy. However, Marquet, who had taken over the Ministry of the Interior in the new government, resigned from the cabinet at the beginning of October, and Deat moved to Paris with the editors of "Oeuvre" when the plan to form a national unity party including the left in Vichy fell through.

The "Legion des Combattants" founded by Marshal Petain could be seen as a replacement for the unified party that failed to materialize. It brought together the members of all previous front-line combatant associations and also the young participants in the Second World War to form a unified organization. What was characteristic of this organization, however, was that none of the names known from the pre-war work of understanding were represented in its leadership and that Vichy appointed Georges Lebecq as its president in the occupied territory, the only French front-line fighter leader who had disavowed contact with the German participants in the Second World War in 1934 and had therefore been removed from the presidency of his association, the "Union Nationale des Combattants". Under these circumstances, the German occupation authorities could naturally neither give their consent to the dissolution of the old front-line combatant associations, which had been tried and tested in communication work, as demanded by Vichy, nor grant permission to organize the "Legion des Combattants" in the occupied territory.

Similar difficulties arose with regard to the unified organizations of the professions that Vichy was striving for. Under the motto of the "National Revolution", reactionary circles in Vichy also sought to eliminate from the leadership of the mass organizations those men who had already proven themselves during the peace as champions of the Franco-German idea of understanding, but who were in the camp of the left. As a result, political circles in Paris became increasingly prejudiced against Vichy, and as Laval was often in Paris, Vichy believed that he was to blame.

In addition, there was an increasing personal estrangement between Marshal Petain and Laval. With regard to Hindenburg's dismissal of Brüning, we have already been reminded of Aristotle's saying that "old men often have a different concept of loyalty than younger men." This statement could be applied with even greater justification to Petain's relations with Laval. For if the German Field Marshal owed his re-election as President of the Reich to his Chancellor, the Marshal of France received the even more far-reaching powers of an unrestricted Head of State from the hands of Laval. However, the victor of Verdun was no more appreciative of his political pacesetter than the victor of Tannenberg. He was looking for an opportunity to get rid of the uncomfortable mediator.

In his dealings with Petain, Laval undoubtedly lacked the outward forms of deference that were due to the marshal given his high rank and age, and which had taken on an almost cult-like character in Vichy since he had become the incarnation of the nation as head of state. Laval smoked

For example, in the presence of the head of state, which was perceived by him as a sign of disrespect, and irritated the old military, who were used to the detailed reporting of the army, with his seemingly erratic presentation and working methods.

Laval's enemies around Petain were not idle in contributing to the deepening of the antagonism between the Head of State and the Deputy Prime Minister. The Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Great Seal, Alibert, who had the role of putting Maurras' ideas into law, had the Marshal's ear to a particularly large extent. The same was true of

Peyrouton, who was appointed Minister of the Interior in October 1940 in place of Adrien Marquet and who, in the so-called "gardes de protection", had combined elements of the "cagoule" formed before the war to overthrow the Republic into a bodyguard of a decidedly fascist character. In the minds of these two men, the plan to overthrow Laval seems to have taken shape, even though they denied it in December 1940 and even though many others still argue with them about this honor today.

The external cause that triggered "December 13" in Vichy was just as unusual as the forms in which the government crisis took place and which earned it the nickname of a "palace revolution".

Hitler had decided to have the mortal remains of Napoleon's son, the Duke of Reichstadt, transferred from the Capuchin crypt in Vienna to the same historical site in Paris on December 15, 1940 - the centenary of the transfer of Napoleon's remains from St. Helena to the Invalides Cathedral in Paris. In a personal letter, he invited Marshal Petain to attend this ceremony. At the same time - in accordance with a wish the French head of state had expressed for some time - the establishment of a zone in Versailles not subject to the sovereignty of the German military commander had been prepared for this first stay in occupied territory.

Hitler's invitation to the ceremony in Paris reached Petain in the early afternoon hours of December 13. The Marshal was initially very pleased with the German gesture and even expressed the intention of visiting other cities in the occupied territory after his stay in Paris. However, Petain's trip to the northern zone and the associated tactics and rallies would have had too much symbolic significance for Franco-German understanding and represented too great a political success for Laval not to drive the opposing forces in Vichy to extremes. They suggested to the Marshal, who was suffering from mental fatigue in the evening due to his age, that the invitation to Paris was nothing but a trap set by Laval in agreement with the Germans. On the occasion of this trip, he was to be forced to renounce his powers as head of the "EtatFrançais" in order to be content with the prerogatives of a former President of the Republic and to recognize that Deputy Prime Minister Laval would take over the leadership of the government.

In the late afternoon of December 13, Marshal Petain convened a council of ministers in the "Hotel du Pare", which served as the government building, during which he asked all members of the cabinet to tender their resignations. At the end of this meeting, he declared that he accepted the resignation of the Minister of Education, Ripert, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Laval. In response to Laval's question, Petain justified this action by saying that Laval no longer enjoyed his confidence, was unpopular and went to Paris too often without reporting back to him afterwards. He had annulled the law that designated Laval as his constitutional successor by virtue of his powers as head of state.

At the time of the opening of the Cabinet Council, a large number of the "gardes de protection" deployed by Interior Minister Peyrouton had already occupied the entrances, the hall and the corridors of the "Hotel du Pare". Shortly after the Council of Ministers, Laval was arrested by this special political police force and detained at his residence in Châteldon. Comte de Brinon, who had delivered Hitler's letter of invitation to the Marshal from Paris at midday, was detained by the "gardes de protection" in his hotel room in Vichy. At the same time as these arrest measures, which also extended to a number of other people, Vichy had all telephone communications with the Northern Zone and the Armistice

Commission in Wiesbaden cut off on the night of December 13 and also stopped rail and car traffic from the unoccupied territory.

General Weygand was the most accurate judge of these events. On the morning of December 14, when he learned in a small North African provincial garrison what had happened in Vichy in the evening, he telephoned a personal confidant in Algiers: "They've gone completely mad over there. If you get involved in something like this, you have to be able to go all the way. Otherwise you're screwed."

The "13th of December" was of course grist to the mill of all opponents of understanding in Germany, although - as I pointed out in one of my reports - it was to a large extent only the result of their own sabotage of Montoire. Hitler's first reaction was to take precautions to occupy the southern zone; the vacation ban for the Wehrmacht in France continued to have an effect until the Christmas holidays. By transferring the remains of the Duke of Reichstadt, Hitler had wanted to honor the defeated France in the person of its greatest soldier, Napoleon. He considered the interpretations and ridiculous insinuations that were made about his gesture in Vichy to be a personal affront. Ribbentrop, who was about to start the negotiations with Laval in Paris that had been due since Montoire, stopped his travel preparations. After lengthy internal discussions between the various departments responsible, it had been proposed that France should be granted far-reaching concessions on the release of prisoners of war, the reduction of occupation costs, the relaxation of the demarcation line and the reintegration of the northern departments.

make. Of course, this was no longer the case. On the contrary, the Reich government and the High Command of the Wehrmacht ordered a tightening of the course in all areas. Berlin was perhaps even happy to be able to back out of the policy entered into at Montoire so easily, which seemed to bring more disadvantages than advantages, especially because of Italy, and the fall of Laval was a welcome pretext for refusing any fundamental political talks with France in the future. When the misunderstandings between Petain and Laval were finally clarified with the help of the embassy, I received binding instructions from Ribbentrop to prevent Laval from re-entering the government.

After the ceremony of the transfer of the remains of the Duke of Reichstadt - the bronze coffin had been collected by the Wehrmacht at the Ostbahnhof on the night of December 15 in a very impressive manner, brought by torchlight on a carriage to the Invalides Cathedral and handed over at its enclosure by the German Embassy in France - I had set off for Vichy to try to catch up with the political situation before it was too late. Many fantastic rumors have grown up around this trip. I apologize to lovers of adventurous reports if I disappoint them by describing the simple facts. I did not invade Vichy with a column of tanks or motorized artillery. My car, in which a Counselor and a Legation Secretary of the Embassy had also taken a seat, was merely followed by two normal passenger cars. They contained the usual eight-man security police escort for overland journeys by official figures in France. Nor, as has been claimed, did I make any terrible threats against Marshal Petain in case he did not give in. The only "reprisal" I threatened was that I would have to refuse his gracious invitation to dinner if no agreement could be reached - a reprisal that would have hit me hardest myself, for the marshal's table was very well-kept.

After he had already sent a military formation of honor - with the "Introduceur des Ambassadeurs" - to meet me at the demarcation line and had the same attention paid to me with a marching band in Vichy, the French head of state received me at his residence in the

Pavillon Sevigne on the morning of December 17. Before my journey to Vichy, I had been assured from various quarters that any German attempt to mediate between the quarrelling parties would result in Petain's immediate resignation, as the Marshal's will to separate from Laval was irrevocable and final. In the course of the conversation which the French Chief of State granted me, he expressed the same opinion several times. For my part, I explained to him that Germany naturally did not wish to interfere in the slightest with the French government's freedom of action in this matter. Laval, however, was in our eyes the guarantor of Montoire's policy. I therefore did not believe that the Imperial Government would accept the policy of cooperation with a French cabinet, from which Laval would remain excluded and in which the ministers responsible for Laval's fall would retain their posts. If the "December 13th" had been a serious affront to Germany, in my opinion, given the current situation between the two countries, it also constituted a crime against France. When I mentioned Laval's arrest, Petain was very surprised. He summoned one of his military aides-de-camp to the room and, in my presence, ordered him to have the measure, of which he was completely unaware, reversed immediately. The marshal suggested that Laval himself be invited to the meeting. Petain's discussion with Laval made it clear to me how important the personal differences in temperament between the old military man and the civilian statesman were in this conflict. Laval turned down Petain's mediating offer to take over a technical ministry in the cabinet. However, at my suggestion, a communiqué was issued to reassure the public about the outcome and length of the talks between Petain and Laval.

In the afternoon I paid Laval a visit in Châteldon - not without having announced this intention to the marshal beforehand and assured myself of his approval. The mobile guards assigned to guard the small castle overlooking Laval's home village had already left that morning. The landlord thanked me for coming, which had indirectly helped him regain his freedom and - as witnesses later confirmed - saved his life. Members of the "gardes de protection" had indeed been hired to assassinate Laval at his unprotected country estate the night after the mobile guards had left. Our conversation took place in a room of the castle, above the fireplace of which a medieval mural had been preserved. It depicted one of the former lords of Châteldon fighting on horseback in a chivalrous battle with Englishmen who had invaded the Auvergne.

Laval was understandably still reeling from the events of which he had become a victim. But much more than his personal fate, he was concerned with the consequences that December 13th could have for France. He repeated several times that he hoped his country would not suffer as a result, that it bore no responsibility for these events and would disapprove of them if they came to its attention. The policy of cooperation must be loyal, clear and without ulterior motives. Nothing great and lasting could ever be based on duplicity.

Towards evening I drove back to Vichy, where a cabinet council had met in the meantime. In order to preserve his prestige on the one hand and to keep the door open to cooperation with Germany on the other, Marshal Petain declared himself ready for a compromise. He was determined to reinstate Laval in the government and to expel from the government those ministers whose false information had led him to dismiss Laval. He wanted to have detailed investigations carried out immediately. However, the change in the Cabinet would not take place until these investigations had

been completed. My proposal to appoint Comte de Brinon as "General Delegate of the French Government in the Occupied Territories" in place of General de Fornelle de la Laurencie, who was no longer recognized by the German authorities in Paris, was accepted by Marshal Petain with immediate effect.

In the late evening hours of December 17, I said goodbye to Marshal Petain and drove back to Paris. Petain gave me a protocol and military escort of honor as far as the demarcation line. Laval, who left the unoccupied territory that same evening, had already joined my car in Vichy. Petain's entourage was visibly unpleasantly affected by Laval's decision to await the further development of the cabinet crisis in Paris. However, the Marshal did not object if Laval abstained from any political activity during his stay in the occupied territory. Laval gave the head of state this assurance. He kept it loyally, even though his absence from the government was not - as could be assumed at the time - to last a few weeks, but almost a year and a half.

The takeover of the government by Admiral Darlan

A joke drawing with four caricatures and corresponding signatures was circulating in the French navy. The first picture showed the resident of Tunis, Admiral Esteva, who had reached the seventh decade of his life without losing his virginity: "The admiral who never - knew love." In second place was also a very old naval officer whose name has slipped my mind and who was said to have never smelled gunpowder: "The admiral who never - knew war." In third place was the well-proportioned, taut silhouette of the fleet commander Darlan: "The admiral who never - knew the sea." In fourth place in the joke drawing was a member of the navy with a long white beard, but whose uniform did not yet bear a single rank insignia: "The sailor who never - knew Darlan."

This characterization of Darlan did not hit the mark. As a young lieutenant at sea, he had sailed almost all the world's oceans and had been assigned to the squadron in the Far East for a long time. During the Great War, however, he led a battery of heavy naval guns in the ground battles, and after the end of the war he mostly held administrative posts in the Navy Ministry, where he rose to the position of Chief of the "Budget-Major General". His strongly formed face, however, had retained the features of a naval officer, as characterized by the long hours of silent service on board, and his water-blue eyes had retained that gaze, always directed into the distance, which is characteristic of all seamen from the wide horizons of the oceans.

Darlan's family originated from Scandinavia, but had been based in Gascony for several centuries. One of his ancestors died in the naval battle of Trafalgar. In each of their subsequent generations, his family had also been damaged in some way - even if only through the loss of assets in English banks - by Great Britain. In addition to the Anglophobia generally prevalent in the French navy, Darlan therefore also had personal resentment against England rooted in family tradition. Through his father, who had been in political life and had himself held a state secretariat in a cabinet of the Third Republic, Francois Darlan had also become familiar with the world of politics, with its ambition and intrigue, from an early age. However, politics did not attract him as much as the navy, and only to the extent that it affected the influence of the navy. Darlan's heart was set on the navy with an exclusivity that made all other interests take a back seat. He took the existing inadequate and poorly equipped units into a powerful weapon. If the French navy was once again a power factor in international politics at the outbreak of the Second World War, as it had been in the heyday of royalty, it was thanks to Admiral Darlan's prudence, organizational skills and tenacious energy.

Under the Daladier government, he was appointed commander-in-chief of the French naval forces in 1939; when the government was reshuffled in June 1940, he also took over as head of the Navy Ministry. In the days of the armistice, Darlan had - in his own words - "asked himself what attitude he should adopt as head of the fleet. He could, of course, have sailed to America with all the units of the French navy, thereby destroying the armistice. However, the armistice agreement and the renunciation of the occupation of the whole of France had shown him that France had a clearly defined place in the reconstruction of Europe. He had therefore ordered the French fleet to follow Marshal Petain, even though a glorious and promising operation against the Italian fleet was on the horizon."

Darlan's authority in the navy was not only evident from their behavior in Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar. It was also demonstrated by the fact that, apart from Admiral Muselier, who was already highly controversial in French naval circles during the peace, no leading naval officer refused to obey and that of the 18,000 French sailors who were in England after the armistice was concluded, only 5,000 went over to de Gaulle. They had been promised great material rewards for joining the "Free French Forces", but if they refused, they were subjected to very harsh and unhealthy internment conditions.

In the negotiations held in Paris at the beginning of December 1940 on the restoration of the French government's sovereignty in the rebellious African colonies, Darlan had spoken out much more strongly than Laval in favor of active action. The idea that the French fleet could come into open conflict with British naval forces on the occasion of its departure for Dakar and the implementation of the blockade of Gabon did not frighten Darlan; in view of the many uses made of the British fleet in other operational areas, he also reckoned with the complete success of the French weapons in the event of a blockade and an attack against Freetown.

The role Darlan played in the Vichy Palace Revolution of December 13 has remained obscure. Laval attributed great influence to him, although - or precisely because - he had stayed away from the decisive cabinet meeting on the afternoon of December 13.

With the fall of Laval, the admiral had in any case become the second man in Frunzi's "Etat", even before he officially took over the leadership of the government and was declared the constitutional successor to the head of state. It was Darlan, to whom I handed over the remains of the Duke of Reichstadt on the night of December 15, 1940, in front of the Invalidendom; he was also the only minister whom Marshal Petain called to the meeting with me on December 17 in Vichy, as he also entrusted him with the mission of delivering a personal hand letter to Hitler, who was in France during the Christmas holidays, to Beauvais on December 25. This letter, as well as Darlan's verbal explanations given on behalf of the Marshal, again strongly emphasized the French government's willingness to cooperate with Germany, but betrayed a certain stiffness on the question of Laval's re-entry into the cabinet. Hitler displayed a conspicuous indifference in the conversation. "In principle," he interjected, "it can make no difference to Germany which personalities make up the French government - if Franco-German relations are to remain what they have been in the past." Vichy took from this statement only that Hitler was uninterested in the composition of the French cabinet; it overlooked the fact that he had simultaneously expressed his disinterest in the resumption of attempts to reach an understanding with France.

In the same Christmas week of 1940, a reception was held at the German Embassy in Paris, at which the transfer of the remains of the Duke of Reichstadt was to be honored. A delegation of Japanese officers had visited the European theaters of war, and before their return journey to the East, a dinner had been given in their honor by the diplomatic mission of the Empire in the French capital. "We have," said the head of the Japanese military delegation in his dinner speech, "taken away great and interesting impressions from the battlefields we visited. But neither Narvik, nor Fort Eben-Emael, nor Dunkirk made as great an impression on us as the news we received during our trip to Europe that Germany had returned the remains of Napoleon's son to France to rest beside the remains of his father. Your country has agreed to this, even though Napoleon brought you much suffering in the

war and was your bitter opponent. You have thus won the greatest victory a victor can win, the victory over himself, over his hatred of the defeated enemy. This gesture will have a tremendous resonance throughout the Japanese people and will evoke the highest reverence."

During this speech, I reflected inwardly on the apathy with which the news of the return of the "Aipjon" had been received in most European countries and in France itself. Certainly this gesture would have been more appropriate in the fall of 1938, when I proposed it to the Reich government, and not at a time when the German flags were flying over the French capital. I was also the last person to recognize the great material difficulties of the hard first The Paris salons' quip "We want meat and they send us bones" - "We want coal and they send us ashes" - seemed to me to gloss over the event from an overly materialistic perspective. The jokes of the Parisian salons "We want meat, and they send us bones" - "We want coal, and they send us ashes" - nevertheless seemed to me to gloss over the event from an overly materialistic perspective and to reveal too little sense of the historical symbolism of the "Roi de Rome", whose coffin in the Capuchin crypt in Vienna had been adorned with bouquets of violets by a never-ending stream of French visitors for a century.

Now a guest from the distant Japanese island kingdom stood before me, a man from the other side of the world, and he showed the gesture of the "Aiglon's" return to his native city the understanding that the city itself had not mustered. The spokesman and head of the Japanese military mission was Lieutenant Colonel Jamashita. A year later, as a general, he accomplished one of the most glorious and heroic feats of arms of the Second World War with the capture of Singapore. After Japan's surrender, the chivalrous soldier was executed as a war criminal. Of the five judges, three voted for the death sentence and two for acquittal. "The greatest victory of a victor" - Jamashita had declared in Paris - "is the victory over himself, the victory over his hatred of the defeated enemy." Today, the sentence carried out on the noble samurai is generally regarded in the United States as an outrageous judicial murder.

In Vichy, the waves of the palace revolution of "December 13" slowly began to subside at the beginning of 1941. In the course of January, most of the ministers responsible for it resigned from the cabinet. Petain temporarily placed the leadership of government affairs in the hands of a "directorate", which was presided over by Darlan and which also included the Minister of War, Huntziger, and Flandin, who had been appointed Foreign Minister in Laval's place. Petain had transferred this important ministry to Flandin on December 13, as the sender of the congratulatory telegrams to the participants of the Munich Conference had a reputation as a staunch supporter of Franco-German understanding. Wilhelmstrasse, Reichsmarschall Göring and the Berlin economic departments even gave him preference over Laval; press correspondents of Dr. Goebbels in Vichy openly expressed this view to the French. However, the embassy had reliable information that Flandin was playing the English card and keeping London constantly informed of Vichy's most confidential cabinet decisions. I therefore did not prevent the Parisian press from launching fierce attacks against Flandin, which resulted in his resignation from the government.

Incidentally, relations between Vichy and England had deteriorated again. On December 24, 1940, Admiral Muselier had seized the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon in New Caledonia in a coup d'état. General de Gaulle was not happy about this Christmas present.

He called Muselier back to London and informed him about his

Thierry d'Argenlieu was sentenced to thirty days in prison for rebelling against his appointment as rear admiral. The United States of America pressed for the neutralization of the two islands. Vichy saw the coup d'état on Saint-Pierre and Miquelon as a breach of its secret agreement with England of

5. December 1940 on maintaining the status quo in the French colonial empire. Admiral Darlan in particular was of the opinion that the French government had regained its freedom of action vis-à-vis the rebellious colonies as a result of this incident.

After a meeting in La Ferte-Haute-Rive on January 19, 1941, a reconciliation between Petain and Laval was in the offing. The purely personal discussion did not touch on the question of Laval's re-entry into the government, but it did remove the decisive psychological obstacles. In the opinion of the embassy, it would have been most beneficial for both German and French interests if Petain had entrusted Laval, who was experienced in governmental and administrative matters, with the civilian sector and the leadership of the cabinet, and Admiral Darlan with the constitutional succession to the head of state and the military sector, including responsibility for the colonial empire. Darlan himself had spoken out in favor of such a solution in the first days of February, but I was instructed by Ribbentrop on February 5, 1941, "to handle the Laval matter in such a way that no agreement could be reached between him and Vichy for the time being. As a result of this instruction, I had to cease my mediation activities in the matter. Since Montoire, the Reich government felt morally bound to Laval and obliged to make concessions; his absence from the government allowed Berlin to interpret "December 13" as the final end to the policy of cooperation with France.

This position of the Reich government and the Führer's headquarters was all the more short-sighted and tragic as Darlan, who now took over the reins of government alone, was also prepared to cooperate extensively and an agreement with him could have been of decisive importance for the German conduct of the war in the Mediterranean and North Africa. According to Darlan, there were only two possible attitudes for patriotic Frenchmen: either to continue the fight against Germany alongside England or to go as far as a military alliance in cooperation with Germany. In either case, France would secure a good position for the peace negotiations; by pursuing an attentive seesaw policy, it would place itself between two stools. As he was convinced of Germany's victory and of the need for European understanding, he had decided to join forces with Germany.

In contrast to Laval, Darlan brought with him a self-contained cadre for his task of reorganization. In addition to confidants from the naval officer corps, whom he also appointed to various key political positions, his cabinet had a tight-knit group of first-class young professionals from the circles of the

They were made available to work in the economy and administration. Some of them had never been politically active before, and some had gone through the "Fire Cross Movement" of Colonel La Rocque and the "French People's Party" of Jacques Doriot. In view of the fragmentation of France into the occupied zone, the unoccupied zone, the African colonial empire and the prisoner-of-war camps in Germany, they did not believe that the time had yet come for a definitive, unified political will for the country; they had just as little expectation of the "National Revolution" proclaimed under the influence of the "Action

Frangaise" in Vichy as of the "National Rally Movement" constituted after "December 13" in Paris by the merger of various groups under the leadership of Marcel Deat. They advocated the idea of a "revolution from above"; the nation was to be confronted with a series of major practical tasks of a technical and social nature, the accomplishment of which could then test the forces and develop the leading elites of a future political order. Such tasks were seen in the agricultural and transportation development of fallow areas in France itself, but above all in the development of the great energy sources and riches of the French colonial empire, which were to take place with pan-European participation and also benefit the European economy as a whole.

Along the same lines was the idea of establishing a European customs union and connecting the major Central European industrial centers with the French Atlantic ports by building a new network of railroad lines, motor roads and canals. Germany's leading role in industrial production was to be matched by France's privileged position in the continent's overseas trade, a project that certainly did not provoke Admiral Darlan's opposition. In terms of domestic policy, a consultative body of a predominantly corporate nature and an administrative revival of the historic provinces were envisaged, as had already been indicated by the appointment of "regional prefects" for departments belonging together.

The group of "young ministers" had its intellectual center in the director of a large Parisian export bank, Leroy-Ladurie, who, however, had personally remained outside the government. In addition to the economic managers and polytechnicians Pucheu, Barnaud, Bichelonne and Lehideux, who were already extraordinarily successful despite their youth, the group also included two writers. Paul Marion, who had once led the French communist student youth, but had broken with the Bolshevik system during a course at the party school in Moscow at the beginning of the 1930s, took over the State Secretariat for Information and Propaganda in the new cabinet. Baron Jacques Benoist-Mechin, whose two-volume work on the "History of the German Army since the Armistice" had been awarded a prize by the **Acudcmic** Frangaise in 1938 'and who in the winter of 1940 took over the **business of the** "French Delegation for Prisoners of War" in Berlin

was appointed State Secretary by Darlan for special use in the Franco-German negotiations.

On April 4, 1941, the group of young cabinet members, in agreement with Darlan, presented Hitler with their "Plan for the Reorganization of France", the foreign policy section of which also held out the prospect of a significant French contribution to the reorganization of Europe. "We have the privilege" - it says - "of taking the floor at a historic moment. The decisions of the coming months will have unlimited consequences. We are fully aware of our responsibility. We accept it in the conviction that we must do our part to ensure that the defeat of France leads to the victory of Europe.

"The French state" - the programmatic declaration goes on to specify - "must not revive the system of alliances and the politics of European equilibrium. Nor does it want to form a weak point and thus become a point of entry for non-European political concepts. It is resolutely committed to the common destiny of the continent and to the solidarity that must unite all European peoples in the future. Based on this conviction, we believe that France, because of its maritime position, has the task of being the bridgehead and shield of Europe on the Atlantic in the defense of the continent. France will only be able to fulfill this task if the same division of labor takes place in this field as we have already proposed for the economic field. The French contribution to the defense of Europe rests first and foremost on

the strength of its fleet and its colonial army. The historic meeting at Montoire showed us that Germany is prepared to be greater than its victory if we prove ourselves capable of being greater than our defeat. This encounter has remained a symbolic act. We have the ambition to turn this symbol into a reality. We want to serve this goal without renouncing anything we are proud of as French people and without making a pact with something that has led our country into the abyss. We want to embark on this task without hesitation. We want to save France. We ask the Führer to put his trust in us."

Reading this appeal to Hitler by the young ministers who joined the French cabinet in 1941 after the war had been lost for the Reich and from the distance of time that had been gained, it may sound almost unbelievable that Hitler passed it over in complete silence. Passionate French patriots, whose names already had a resonance in their country despite their youth, who had a strong fleet ready for action behind them, who had a large part of the French colonial army's officer corps on their side, who were even able to create an effective political organization devoted to them in North Africa, offered the Reich government a hand for a common defence and a common reconstruction of Europe - - and the Reich government rejected this hand! The consequence was that the vigor of this group was also broken in a few months; some of its members

were disillusioned with Hitler and joined the resistance movement because they saw this as the only way to rebuild France; others continued the fight for Franco-German understanding against the incomprehension of the Reich government and the Führer's headquarters, only to break down in the end.

While the English press was attacking Darlan and his cabinet in ever harsher tones and foreign countries were becoming generally aware that the test of strength between the opponents and supporters of a policy of Franco-German cooperation in Vichy, which had been challenged by "13 December", had turned out entirely in favor of the latter, Berlin was more entrenched than ever in its attentive attitude towards the French question.

"It is to be feared," I warned in a report in April 1941, "that the new forces in the French cabinet will succumb to the enemy's intrigues and lose their thrust if they are not soon supported by a few German concessions. Marshal Petain was already speaking of Darlan in the same way he had spoken of Laval before December 13, that is to say, he accused him of constantly making concessions to Germany that went beyond the armistice without receiving German concessions in return. If an effective moral, economic and military involvement of France in the battle front against England is desired, it is therefore necessary to decide whether the French forces with a positive attitude towards us should be supported domestically by small successes or be exposed to their slow dissolution."

It was not a constructive political idea, but a completely peripheral and coincidental event that prompted Hitler to resume talks with France. But as after Montoire, the contact was again limited to a purely military area and deliberately avoided the clarification of political relations between Germany and France, which was essential for military cooperation.

British troops had invaded southern Iraq at the beginning of May and were marching towards the capital. Baghdad sent a call for help to Germany, which Hitler did not want to ignore. However, the only possible support - the deployment of aircraft - was called into question by the great distance. Even from the island of Rhodes, which had been well prepared by the Italians for the deployment of the Luftwaffe, and from Crete, which had recently come under German control, it was impossible to reach Mesopotamia in a non-stop flight. Hitler therefore instructed me to obtain permission from the French government for German aircraft to land at Syrian airports.

On May 6, 1941, Darlan gave his consent to the requested assistance for the military support of Iraq, but noted that the state of defense of this country was completely inadequate and that support from outside should have been prepared long in advance. After the capture of Iraq, the British forces would certainly be ready to attack.

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to the French mandate territory of Syria. This, too, could not be defended against an opponent with modern equipment, given the means available. However, he took it upon himself to be seen by the French public as the man who had lost Syria, as he was convinced that by supporting the German war in the Middle East, he would achieve concessions for France in other areas and an improvement in Franco-German relations in general.

Five days later, on n. May 1941, Hitler received Darlan in Berchtesgaden. It was the second Sunday in May, which is celebrated every year in France as Joan of Arc's national holiday. In his words of welcome, Darlan did not fail to draw Hitler's attention to this date and its symbolic significance for the fight against England. The huge wide window of the Berghof's reception hall offered a view of high mountain nature in the most radiant

springtime glow. Hitler's mood was less radiant and spring-like. During the conversation with the French guest, he made a completely absent impression - the British radio had just reported Rudolf Hess's jump over Scotland and made initial comments on the incident. Judging by the gloomy expression on Hitler's face, he was rather unimpressed by this political test flight by his deputy, or perhaps just by the reception it had received in London.

With reference to "December 13th", Hitler emphasized to Darlan once again the responsibility that the Reich government was taking upon itself by continuing the policy of cooperation. "Every concession made by Germany within the framework of this policy", Hitler declared, "weakens its military and economic war potential. A relaxation of the demarcation line would increase the danger of espionage in occupied territory; the reduction of occupation costs could have a detrimental effect on the material standard of living of the troops and thus also on their combat value. The release of prisoners of war entailed the danger that they would join resistance organizations inside the country or go over to de Gaulle. Since Germany was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with England, he, as leader of the German people, could only weaken the German war potential by making concessions of the aforementioned kind if counter-concessions were made to the German war effort in other areas. This would amount to horse-trading, but he could not change his position. If France supported the German conduct of the war, as was currently the case in Syria, the Reich government was not in a position to make concessions to the French government on a case-by-case basis and to grant relief."

On this basis of "do ut des", which avoided a principled decision on Franco-German relations, military negotiations were initiated in the German embassy in Paris following Darlan's meeting in Berchtesgaden. They led to a protocol on May 28, 1941, which was signed by the French Minister of War, Huntziger, and the German General Warlimont as the representative of the High Command of the Wehrmacht. The "Huntziger-Warlimont Protocol" was divided into three parts, the first of which dealt with arms aid for Iraq via Syria. The second consisted of securing supplies for Rommel via Syria, the third of supporting German naval operations in the mid-Atlantic from Dakar.

The protocol on the "Syria-Iraq" section had already been largely realized at the time of its signing; others became practically irrelevant a few days later due to the collapse of Iraq's military resistance. The French services consisted of the delivery of war material from Syria to Iraq; permission for German aircraft to land at Syrian airports for the duration of the fighting in Mesopotamia; the instruction of Iraqi soldiers by French military experts and the forwarding of reports on British operations to German intelligence services. In return, Germany released war material stockpiled in Syria on the basis of the ceasefire agreement; it also authorized the allocation of a fighter squadron from French North Africa and the reinforcement of the French land forces in Syria through the supply of crews, weapons and ammunition from metropolitan France. Germany was to protect these supplies by sea up to Castellorizza and France from Castellorizza onwards. Germany was to be responsible for supplying the French transport ships with fuel when they called at Greece and for arranging transportation by rail via the Balkans.

Some preliminary work had already been carried out in the "North Africa" section of the protocol before it was signed on May 28. For example, on March 25, 1941, Darlan had already provided Rommel with a considerable number of motor vehicles from Tunisian

army stocks at the request of the embassy in Paris and had the German Africa Corps supplied with food, especially fresh vegetables.

The protocol now envisaged supplying the German forces in Libya largely via the French military port of Bizerta. The supplies were to be delivered to southern Italian ports, but above all to Toulon, and from there transported to Bizerta on French ships under the protection of the French navy. From Bizerta to the Tunisian-Libyan border station of Gabes, France took over the transportation by rail. The German escorts were required to wear civilian clothes and their numbers were to be kept as small as possible. France also agreed to provide the German Africa Corps with heavy artillery and coastal artillery from stocks in French North Africa to the extent that they could be spared at the moment for the defense of French North Africa. In addition, France provided the German Africa Corps with 1600 trucks and 600 smaller vehicles, while at the same time taking over the transportation of food and other supplies for the troops.

The German *quid pro quo* consisted in the release of weapons and ammunition stockpiled in French North Africa on the basis of the armistice agreement and in the authorization to supplement the arsenals there from the stocks of metropolitan France. Of the French armistice army in the unoccupied territory, 3 5 0 officers and 9000 non-commissioned officers and men were to be assigned to the French colonial forces in French North and West Africa. In addition, the French navy was granted greater freedom of movement for training purposes and to protect French merchant shipping; in the event of sudden threats from British naval forces, the French units were to be able to leave without having to obtain the prior, always very lengthy approvals of the German and Italian armistice commissions.

This latter provision was also important for the third section of the protocol, in which the German naval command took a particular interest and which dealt with French West and Equatorial Africa. From July 15, 1941, France wanted to allow German submarines and merchant ships to be supplied in the port of Dakar; after Dakar had been sufficiently defended, the German navy was to be granted the use of the port facilities and the German air force the establishment of air bases in a second period. The French government then took over the protection of this German naval supply and air force base with its own armed forces; it defended the entire territory of French West Africa against any attack, if necessary also by offensive actions against enemy bases and positions. The French and German intelligence services exchanged reports on British naval movements and military preparations in the area of Central Africa and the coastal waters.

In order to restore its sovereignty in the rebellious areas of Equatorial Africa and to defend Dakar against expected attacks, the French government considered it necessary, in addition to the release of weapons and ammunition stocks stockpiled on the basis of the armistice agreement, to set up 4 reconnaissance, 2 bomber and 4 fighter squadrons. To strengthen the land forces, 614 officers, 2376 non-commissioned officers and 7668 white and 11660 black men from the old colonial army were to be released from German captivity and 6000 French naval personnel were to be released to strengthen the fleet. The rearmament and commissioning of 2 destroyers, 3 torpedo boats and 2 submarines were initially considered sufficient to supplement the available naval units. After this time, two more destroyers and submarines, the battleship "Provence" and the aircraft carrier "Commandant Teste" were to be put back into service. In addition to the release of fuel for these units, the French government requested the right to recruit volunteers in the occupied

territory and permission to reopen the French Luft weapons school in St. Raphael.

I apologize to the reader if I have taken up too much of his patience by listing these (et hnic h details. They are, however, necessary for an understanding of the further development of this promising and already detailed draft of a German-French military alliance. France, at the risk of losing Syria, gave Iraq the military assistance desired by Germany; it offered to take over Rommel's supplies via Bizerta, which could trigger military reactions from England; it was even prepared to provide the German fleet and air force with bases in Dakar, which was bound to trigger military reactions from England. In contrast, however, the German counter-concessions consisted only of the release of stockpiled weapons and ammunition and the relaxation of some of the military provisions of the armistice treaty. These German military concessions were - as the French government rightly emphasized - as much in the German interest as in the French interest. They could not be made public for reasons of secrecy and, moreover, the mass of the population did not care whether the rearmament of this or that unit was approved or not. It was therefore necessary to make concessions that would appeal to the man in the street, even if they were less "essential" than "spectacular". Apart from these psychological considerations, however, it was also impossible for the French government to accept such far-reaching military cooperation with Germany out of a sense of national responsibility as long as the major political issues of Franco-German relations remained completely up in the air. On the basis of these considerations, Darlan and I signed a framework protocol at the same time as the military "Huntziger-Warlimont Protocol", in which reference was made to the need for the "Imperial Government to put the French Government in a position to justify itself before the public opinion of its country in the event of the outbreak of an armed conflict with England and the United States" by making political and economic concessions.

Three days later, on June 1, 1941, the protocols signed in Paris on May 28 were the subject of a discussion at the summer residence of the Reich Foreign Minister in Fuschl, to which Ribbentrop invited not only me but also the head of the economic delegation of the German Armistice Commission, Envoy Hemmen.

hi a recording made after this debate reads verbatim:

"The Reich Foreign Minister drew up a comprehensive picture of the general situation with regard to our relationship with France. Nothing worse could happen **to us** than France getting into an open **war** with England. More or less minor skirmishes such as those in **Mers el Kcbir** and Dakar were very welcome, but they must not degenerate into a declaration of war, because in the event of open warfare

England should first of all implement the blockade against metropolitan France with the utmost severity. This would put North Africa in a precarious position, which could shake its adherence to Vichy. Without Gibraltar, however, Germany would be powerless against North Africa; but we could not take Gibraltar because Spain would not cooperate.

However, this did not mean very much, as events were just around the corner that would completely change the world view. With this change in the world view, the question of France would resolve itself by the end of this year; therefore, there was no need to make any concessions today.

Now that the British had taken Baghdad, the Iraq question was completely

settled and our last two airworthy military aircraft had left Iraq. Now we had to wait and see how things developed there. He personally considered it completely out of the question that Britain would attempt to invade Syria.

What the French were doing for us in Tripoli and Bizerta was not worthy of any kind of return, but was actually a matter of course, said Foreign Minister Ribbentrop.

Abetz says that he is thinking about new concessions for Bizerta and the bases in West Africa. - Ribbentrop: 'Politically, I have nothing to give. Hemmen, do you have anything to give economically?' - Hemmen: 'No'.

Abetz asked whether the French could be given concrete assurances regarding the existence of North Africa, especially Morocco. - 'As far as Tunis was concerned,' Ribbentrop said, 'that was completely out of the question, but we would also have to wait and see about Morocco, as we might have to give Spain something after all.

Von Ribbentrop went on to say that he personally did not believe in the French. Darlan himself was perhaps convinced that Germany would win, but the French inclination towards England and their historical aversion to Germany were too great to be trusted. Moreover, he could have no respect for the French if they would so easily defect to the victor in order to fight against yesterday's ally.

This mistrust of France was also shared by the Führer, who had told him: 'I still prefer a secure friend - Italy - to an insecure ally'.

Ribbentrop tells Ambassador Abetz: 'You think differently. I know it, but I'm warning you'

In these remarks by the Reich Foreign Minister, the first argument was undoubtedly the most cogent: the over-activation of the North and West African question on the basis of Franco-German cooperation could indeed trigger English military reactions, which it might no longer be possible to control. Especially in foreign policy

Sometimes problems and situations arise that it is better not to force because it can lead to the opposite of the desired consequences. In the present case, however, it could by no means be assumed that the passivity of Germany and France in the African colonial empire would cause England to remain passive. On the contrary, all the developments to date and all the news indicated that the Anglo-Saxon warfare was pursuing with iron determination the plan to take control of all the key strategic positions on the Black Continent and, in particular, French North Africa, in order to strike a devastating blow from there against the weak point of the Axis, Italy. Germany should therefore have secured the positions from which it could parry this blow in good time with French help.

Ribbentrop had obviously alluded to the impending war with Russia, about whose preparations we in Paris had been kept in complete ignorance, with the secret reference that "events were just around the corner which would completely change the world view, whereby the question of France would be solved by itself by the end of the year". I received the first news of the outbreak of this war on the radio on June 22. But shouldn't the very thought of the Eastern campaign have prompted the Reich government to secure the Mediterranean and North Africa militarily with the greatest acceleration and with all available means even before it began? Could it be assumed - especially after the failure of Rudolf Hess in London - that Great Britain would allow the commitment of German forces in Russia to slip away without pressing ahead with its operations against the southern front of the Axis?

I pass over Ribbentrop's statement that "what the French are doing for us in Tripoli and Bizerta is not worthy of any consideration and is actually a matter of course". I will also refrain from repeating what Rommel said to me in the spring of 1944 about this unforgivable blindness on the part of the Reich government, which deprived the German Afrika Korps of the only supply route that could have ensured it lasting success.

As far as the "safe friend" was concerned, which was preferable to an "uncertain ally", it is worth mentioning that on the same day that Ribbentrop, out of loyalty to Italy, announced this renunciation of cooperation with France, on June 1, 1941, Count Ciano made the following entry in his diary: "The Duce fears that the Germans want to conclude their agreement with France quickly and that we will have to bear the costs. If we really had to give up our western revindications, this would have very serious consequences in Italy, which could have a detrimental effect on the prestige of the regime." - Maintaining these demands on Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Tunis and Algiers may have spared the Fascist regime a loss of prestige; but the sabotage of Franco-German cooperation thus committed led all too soon to the downfall of the Fascist regime itself through the loss of Libya, Sicily and southern Italy.

A week after the above-mentioned note, on June 9, 1941, Count Ciano confided the following, no less revealing thought to his diary: "The news about Syria is rather confused, but a significant contingent seems to have gone over from Dentz to the Gaullists. I do not dislike this at all. The deployment of Vichy-France on the side of the Axis could only be to the detriment of Italy."

The British forces released in Iraq had - regardless of the fact that on June 1, 1941, the Reich Foreign Minister had considered it "completely out of the question that England would attempt to invade Syria" - launched an attack on the French mandate territory on June 8. However, the army of the French High Commissioner, General Dentz, put up the most loyal resistance against the invading British - again regardless of Ribbentrop's doubts about France's reliability expressed on June 1. Even the defection of a "significant contingent" of the French Syrian army, which Count Ciano noted with satisfaction, was symptomatic of this. A colonel who sympathized with de Gaulle had indeed marched his troops in the desert towards the English lines. However, when the troops realized close to their destination that they were to be led into the enemy camp, they decided to march back without their colonel.

England crossed the borders of Syria simultaneously at several points with far superior forces and also deployed strong naval forces to bombard important points and roads from the sea. London justified this attack with the presence of German troops and aircraft in the French mandate area. In reality, there had never been any German troops in Syria; the last German aircraft deployed in Iraq and landing in Syria had already returned to their bases in Greece several days earlier. It is also clear that Britain had planned for a long time to take control of Syria. As early as the days of the armistice, Colonel Larminat had attempted to persuade the Mandate territory to revolt against Vichy. At the beginning of December 1940, General Puaux reported from Beirut that, according to the news available to him, an English attack was imminent. The French government immediately dispatched Chiappe, a Parisian police prefect born in Corsica and known for his hostility to England and his energy, to Syria as High Commissioner. However, Chiappe's plane, which had been spotted east of Italy, never arrived at its destination; whether its disappearance was merely due to an ordinary traffic accident remains unclear. In 1941, London transferred the

operation against the French Mandate to General Catroux. The British forces were supported by a division led by General Legentilhomme and made up of French, Poles, Czechs and members of the International Brigade.

Syria had a key strategic position for the control of the Middle East as well as for the control of the eastern Mediterranean and the Suez Canal; its possession was also of considerable importance for the operations in Libya. It was therefore all the more incomprehensible that Hitler rejected the Wehrmacht High Command's proposal to seize Cyprus after the occupation of Crete. The British forces on Cyprus were so small that the island could have been taken without great effort; but only from there would it have been possible for Germany to support France militarily in the defense of Syria.

In addition to its strategic importance, the battle for the French mandate territory was also of great political significance. The heroic defense of Dakar had not been without influence on the outcome of the Montoire encounter. Since December 13, however, Hitler's mistrust of France had once again become insurmountable. Could a loyal, courageous defense of Syria not restore the Reich government's confidence and lead to a new, this time much more far-reaching "Montoire"? The decision for the further development of Franco-German cooperation in Africa, indeed for the future shape of the neighborhood between the two countries on the Rhine, was perhaps now made in the Levant.

I had therefore asked Dr. Rudolf Rahn, a Parisian embassy councillor familiar with Middle Eastern issues from his previous work at the embassy in Ankara, at the beginning of May to convince General Dentz and the officer corps of the French Syrian army on the spot of the political importance of their militarily almost hopeless mission. What Dr. Rahn achieved as a "diplomat on a lost post" both for the accelerated implementation of the arms deliveries to Iraq and for the moral, economic and military consolidation of the French resistance in the mandate territory of Syria, which was threatened by indigenous uprisings and Gaullist influences, has at most a counterpart in the secret activities of the American diplomat Murphy in French North Africa.

The German embassy in Paris supported the Syrian campaign by trying by all means to push through political and economic concessions by Germany to the French government, despite the negative answer given by the Reich Foreign Minister on June 1, 1941. This brought me into my first open conflict with Ribbentrop. "You are an incorrigible Baden democrat," he reproached me in the most agitated tone, "who thinks that everyone can have a say in government matters. The Führer makes policy on France all by himself. Seibstich, as Reich Foreign Minister, has to submit to his decisions." At the end of the scene, a feeling of genuine human warmth suddenly broke through the rigid mask that Ribbentrop was increasingly putting on: "I don't want you to fail in your mission as ambassador as an employee of my office."

But was loyalty to followers allowed to go as far as setting aside national interests that were considered important? Was there not a loyalty to the cause in addition to, indeed above, loyalty to the person?

Despite the evasive attitude of the Reich Foreign Minister, I continued to campaign with the utmost determination for the conclusion of a fundamental agreement with France and tried to convince other departments of this idea over the head of the Foreign Office. In the High Command of the Wehrmacht I naturally found the full support of General Warlimont, who had led the Paris negotiations to such a militarily significant result; in the

High Command of the Army it was above all Quartermaster General Wagner who made himself an advocate of cooperation with France. On June 25, 1941, I was able to interest Reichsmarschall Göring in Karinhall in the concessions to the French government that fell within his remit. In my telegraphic report to Berlin, I continuously demanded guarantees for the continued existence of the French colonial empire, the reincorporation of the Northern Departments and the lifting of the exclusion zone, the relaxation of the demarcation line, the release of notable categories of prisoners of war, including those who had fought in the 1914-1918 World War, the supply of German industrial products and sugar to French North Africa and the reduction of occupation costs.

I campaigned for the latter concession with particular passion, as I saw the honor of the Reich government involved in this area. Admiral Darlan had been promised on the day and on the occasion of the release of the Syrian airports for stopovers by German aircraft the reduction of the assessment costs from 400 to 300 million francs a day, a reduction which could not harm the interests of the Reich in the least, since an unused surplus of 80 billion francs had accumulated on the account of the German occupation costs at the Banque de France since the armistice. At my request, the head of the German Armistice Commission, General Vogl, had conceded the above reduction to the French government at a meeting in Paris, and it had already been announced in the occupied and unoccupied territories by press and radio. Berlin, however, made its agreement dependent on the condition that of the 300 million francs of daily occupation costs, 100 million would not be transferred in paper money but in gold and foreign currency, which of course would not have been a relief for the French state budget compared to the previous arrangement, but a complication. When I pointed out to the head of the economic delegation of the German Armistice Commission, the envoy Hemmen, "that this kind of procedure would put Darlan and the anti-English cabinet members in an impossible position domestically", he replied "that it was doubtful whether the Reich Foreign Minister and the Reich government would regret such a development, since, according to his observations, they did not wish to cooperate with France at all". - Despite Ribbentrop's prohibition to interfere further in the matter, I took the opportunity to speak to Hitler personally

on June 30, 1941, to bring about his decision for an effective reduction of the occupation costs. Most of my other proposals for German concessions were also gradually accepted; however, the Reich government's approvals all came far too late to provide political support for the military protocols of May 28 during the great psychological test of the Syrian campaign.

Meanwhile, the battle in the French mandate area, which was very unequal from the outset given the mutual balance of power, was coming to an end. Several battalions urgently required to reinforce the Syrian army had been transported by rail from France to Salonika; however, Germany did not provide the few Ju 52s that would have been needed to transport these battalions onwards for several days.

After a month of heroic and costly resistance, General Dentz surrendered to the British army on July 12, 1941, and General Catroux proclaimed the independence of Syria and Lebanon.

On July 14, 1941, Vichy submitted a note to the Reich government in which it did not cancel the Huntziger-Warlimont protocols, but made their further implementation dependent on a fundamental clarification of the political relationship between Germany and France, referring to the loss of Syria and the increasingly harsh language of England and America.

"France" - declared the French government in this note - "has done its honor to fulfill all the provisions of the armistice, with which the names of Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar will always be associated, in an irreproachable manner.

On October 24, 1940, Marshal Petain made the policy of cooperation offered to him by Reich Chancellor Hitler his own.

This cooperation has reached a point where it brings France into conflict with its allies of yesterday, and the hitherto only local and temporary attacks by Great Britain threaten to turn into a general war with all its suffering and destruction.

The prospect of these new trials, in which the French land, sea and air forces will prove themselves worthy of their tradition, as in Syria, does not deter the French government from the path it has freely and consciously chosen. But this prospect imposes new duties and new responsibilities on it towards its own people as well as towards Germany.

The French Government would be acting irresponsibly if it dragged the French nation into a new war without the certainty that the policy it is pursuing in the spirit of its country's great European traditions against English imperialism is the only one capable of restoring France to its place in the concert of the great powers. The French government would also be lacking in responsibility towards Germany if

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it did not openly disclose the moral and material conditions on which the effectiveness of French political and military action depended."

In order to ensure an effective political and military deployment of France alongside the Axis powers, the French government's note of July 14, 1941 proposed the replacement of the armistice treaties with pre-peace treaties with Germany and Italy. France wanted to integrate itself into the economic organization of the European continent, support all German and Italian initiatives to restore peace and reorganize Europe and join the Tripartite Pact after peace was concluded if Germany and Italy undertook not to make any claims to the territories of metropolitan France and the colonial empire in the peace negotiations, apart from the return of the former German colonies and a possible exchange of territory in the

overseas possessions. The Alsace-Lorraine question was to be resolved in the peace treaty in such a way that this territory would no longer give rise to fratricidal strife in the future.

In the course of replacing the armistice agreement, the note proposed to the French government the progressive restoration of French sovereignty in the occupied territory, the abolition of the zonal borders, the gradual release of prisoners of war, the conclusion of economic agreements on the basis of equality and an ever-increasing reduction in occupation costs.

In the military field, France assured the Axis powers with immediate effect that it would defend all territories under its sovereignty against any attack; in accordance with its material and moral reinforcement, it undertook to reconquer the rebellious colonies, to secure the maritime routes of its colonial empire and also to repel attacks on metropolitan France. The rearmament of France required to fulfill these obligations was to be placed under a control yet to be determined.

At the time the note from the French government of July 14, 1941 was handed over, I was at the Führer's headquarters, which had been transferred to East Prussia for the Russian campaign. As Hitler had nothing else on his mind but the military operations on the eastern front, I was unable to reach him personally; however, I learned from his entourage and from the field headquarters of the Reich Foreign Minister how well the French proposals had been received by him. He interpreted them as a blackmail maneuver by Vichy, who wanted to use the commitment of German forces in Russia to get rid of his obligations under the armistice and deprive the Reich of the fruits of its victory in the Western campaign. This was of course Darlan's intention, as it would have been the intention of any government in this situation. Hitler, however, overlooked the fact that Darlan, in return, would use his fleet and the French colonial army to defeat the British in the Mediterranean.

and in North Africa while the German Wehrmacht fought on the eastern front. Was this not worth the renunciation of certain advantages of the WaHcnstillstand agreement and the postponement of the Alsace-Lorraine Hage until the peace treaty, a proposal of the French note about which Hitler was particularly upset?

Of course, Hitler had also received news - especially from Italian sources - that the Syrian army had only put up sham resistance and that General Dentz's surrender was a maneuver that was by no means justified by the military situation and had been set up with the British. Was it permissible to alienate a friend who brought such "safe" news in favor of an "ally" who was so "unsafe" militarily?

Three weeks after receiving the note from the French government, Ribbentrop sent me the following instructions from the Führer's headquarters in Paris: "I would ask you to inform Admiral Darlan in conversation at your next meeting that the attention of the leading figures in the Reich government is currently completely absorbed by the operations in the East. We could therefore not at present comply with the Admiral's request for a new discussion on the questions pending between Germany and France. This does not mean, however, that we do not wish to continue negotiations with the French Government in due course and reach a sincere understanding with it. As soon as it is possible to resume the examination of the various questions under discussion, you will inform Admiral Darlan. - The purpose of this communication to Admiral Darlan is not to break the thread between us and the Vichy Government, but not to enter into concrete negotiations with them."

"We believe that France has the task of being the shield of the continent on the Atlantic" - declared the group of young activist ministers when they joined the cabinet in April 1941. At

that time, the Reich had not yet entered a war on two fronts. Now it was here. But the Reich government assumed that the German sword would quickly gain enough ground in the east to be able to do without the French shield in the west.

"The crusade of Europe" without Europeans

During a meeting at the Führer's headquarters, Laval once said to Hitler: "You want to win the war in order to create Europe - you must create Europe in order to win the war." This statement by the French Prime Minister was only too justified.

National Socialist Germany had a somewhat concrete idea of "Fortress Europe"; there was also no lack of approaches to an understanding of the continent's economic community of interests. But the Third Reich was not able to develop a political idea that would bind all the peoples of the West. It did not counter the Atlantic Charter of the Anglo-Saxons with a European Charter of the Axis powers.

Certain party circles envisioned a new European order, within which Italy would take the lead over the south and Germany the lead over the north of the continent and which would find its roots and connection in the ideological kinship of Fascism and National Socialism. Other party circles, in particular the SS, thought of a "Holy Germanic Empire of the German Nation", which, in contrast to the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", would only bring peoples of the Nordic race into a more or less close state connection with Germany. Third parties, on the other hand, wanted to settle for a "Greater German Empire" with some territorial expansion, but without national ties to other states. What all these plans had in common was that they envisaged a reorganization of Europe without the active involvement and cooperation of France and that they were unable to create the psychological conditions for mobilizing all European energies for the continent's fateful struggle. This deficiency became particularly apparent after the beginning of the Eastern campaign. German propaganda may have called for a "European crusade" against Asian Bolshevism in posters, printed matter, newspaper articles and radio broadcasts, but German policy did not proclaim a supranational program that could captivate all Europeans and protect and liberate the broad masses abroad against the communist messianism of Soviet Russia. Thus the Reich stood almost entirely alone in the defense of the West, not only militarily but also ideologically.

It may hardly seem credible, but it is nevertheless true that in 1942, when the Eastern campaign had already passed through its first critical stages, Berlin even banned the "propaganda" of the European idea for a time. This ban had been due to an objection from fascist Italy, where

the idea of Europe had always been on the index. When the Reich youth leadership organized a "European Youth Congress" in Vienna in the summer of 1942 and a "European Youth Association" was subsequently founded, these initiatives met with great resistance in Rome as well as from the Reich government; the invitation to this conference extended to French youth representatives via the German embassy in Paris had to be revoked. The invitation of French writers to the "European Poets' Conferences" in Weimar in 1941 also only came about without approval and in 1942 despite a pronounced ban by Dr. Goebbels.

It must seem equally incomprehensible that the National Socialist state leadership made no attempt to revive the medieval idea of the Reich, even though this idea embodied the traditional mission of the German people in the leadership and defense of the West against the threats from the East.

The narrowing of the German view of history already dated back to the years of peace; however, it was to prove particularly disastrous during the war, when Germany had become the leader of the continent as a result of its initial great military successes and this leadership task also made political demands.

The Reich, which party propaganda had predicted would last for a thousand years, was launched as the "Third Reich" after Moeller van den Bruck's book of the same name.

The Weimar Republic was considered too insignificant to find a place in the numbering.

The state of Bismarck was accorded an emphasized but measured respect, if only because of the person of its founder. At the beginning of Berlin's redesign, the Great Star in the Tiergarten was given the name "Platz des Zweiten Reiches" (Square of the Second Reich) and the monuments of the 1970s, which had been removed from their locations, were re-erected on it. In an adjacent part of the Tiergarten, even the Hohenzollern dynasty, immortalized in marble on behalf of Wilhelm II, found its new "Doll Alley". Although it was once again worthily housed, the large stream of walkers no longer found their way to it. And even if the Victory Column and the statues of Bismarck, Moltke and Roon saw the uninterrupted traffic of the great axis flowing past at their feet, it was traffic at a speed of eighty kilometers, leaving no time for thought to linger. The "Square of the Second Reich" was too far removed from the centers of the city to attract contemplative observers. Despite the traffic that passed over it, it was a museum without visitors.

The First Reich of the Germans, which had lasted a thousand years not in words but in fact, was less easy to accommodate in the "Third". Even the figure of its founder did not fit into the program. He figured in National Socialist literature as "Karl, whom history has called the Great". But did this solve the problem of the Middle Ages for the party? Was it allowed out of enthusiasm

for the Saxon Duke Widukind, deny the great day of Germania in history, the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", out of disapproval of the motives for the Italian campaigns? Did she not thereby also deny the historical unity of Western culture, did she not break all historical bridges to the West?

While the party entrenched itself in its ideological battle position against the medieval idea of the emperor, Hitler himself seemed to be more open-minded on this issue and also wanted to honor the millennium after the migration of peoples in the family tree of the Third Reich. He at least had a sense of the tragic dualism in German history and had Charlemagne march alongside Duke Widukind and Emperor Barbarossa alongside Henry the Lion in the historical parades of the "Days of German Art" in Munich.

I once had the opportunity to get to know Hitler's personal opinion on this question. It was late winter 1941/42. The pines and spruces between which the barracks of the Führer's headquarters were scattered were bending under the weight of their snow, an icy wind swept across the dark sky, and the shoveled connecting paths between the individual quarters crunched with frost. After my lecture on the French problems, which Ribbentrop attended, Hitler invited us to a small snack in his private bunker. When the table was set, I brought up the subject of commemorations of the 12th anniversary of Charlemagne's birth, which had been organized in St. Denis and Aachen at the suggestion of the German Embassy in Paris, but which the German press had hushed up on the instructions of Dr. Goebbels.

"It would be foolish," Hitler explained in the course of this conversation, "to deny the great tradition of the Christian West. The German emperors of the Middle Ages are among

the most powerful rulers of all time. When it was still a problem for the English kings to ride into Wales and Scotland, they were already making world history. The English kings, however, have found their Shakespeare, which has made them famous throughout the world, and the German emperors have not to this day. The party accuses the great imperial dynasties of the Middle Ages of having neglected the interests of the empire in the East. I can sympathize with them so well" - and Hitler cast a half-joking, half-serious glance at the darkened, closed bunker window against which the winter storm was lashing - "that they preferred to move south. Since I know the East from my own experience, I * can fully understand them. It is perhaps something for the young; for my part, I have had enough of it, and at the risk of Rosenberg or Himmler giving me a bad mark as a German ruler, I would like to spend the rest of my days where the sun comes first in spring and goes away last in winter, in Carinthia and southern Baden."

"The church" - Hitler continued after a short silence - "has played a significant and by no means only negative role in the Reichsgeschichte."

Even in more recent times there is no lack of evidence of an absolutely German attitude. Even Bavarian monasteries provided important assistance to the national movements after 1918 on more than one occasion."

"The Habsburgs too", Hitler added in a remarkable contrast to certain statements in "Mein Kampf", "achieved great things, especially at the beginning of their dynasty, when they brought a very valuable knighthood into the country and formed an exemplary administrative body. Charles V and Maria Theresa were political geniuses of the first order. In contrast to northern Germany, the idea of empire was always kept alive in Austria."

"The attitude," Hitler declared in conclusion, "which so many National Socialists express towards the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation is to be rejected. After the war, I intend to always have the imperial regalia presented at the opening of the party congresses in Nuremberg."

How would the medieval imperial crown, the imperial orb of Charlemagne and the coronation mantle of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen have fared in the National Socialist Congress Hall if this had happened?

One can neither deny one's ancestors by force nor confess them by force, and there is nothing to suggest that Hitler ever appreciated or even understood the federalist and universal idea of empire of the medieval emperors, which was deeply rooted in morality. It really would not have been possible to compose a hymn to him, such as the arch-poet sang to Emperor Barbarossa at the Imperial Diet of Navarra:

"Charles and Augustus are united in you.
When you walk victoriously around your world, bringing
peace. Spread justice in the world, For injustice
succumbed to you like the enemy."

And under his leadership, the German people no longer deserved the praise that an ode by Victor Hugo could still bestow on the Germans in the middle of the nineteenth century:

"Among the peoples forts tu fus le peuple juste."

Certainly, the medieval idea of empire was in many ways a dream that could not be realized, and the realistically politically gifted peoples have achieved more in the world than the Germans. But it was written from the soul of the German people, and it is sometimes better for the purity of their nature to chase after great dreams than to be unfaithful to them.

But perhaps it was not even possible for the generation of national socialist party leaders, who saw their task in the unification of Greater Germany, to have been up to the task of unifying Europe at the same time. The words of the cultural philosopher Simmel, "Every form is a limitation, a renunciation of that which lies beyond the borders", also apply to the

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Formation of a nation. In order to gain its own form, a nation must shield itself from external influences until its internal transformation process is sufficiently complete. Even if the men of the Third Reich had possessed all the necessary qualities to solve the national question, it would have been impossible for them to think and act supranationally for this very reason.

The military development of the Second World War, however, meant that the same men were faced with the German and the European task at the same time and that the leadership of the continent fell to them before their nation had gained the inner shape indispensable

for this function.

Although the French Revolution was at least universalist in its ideas, it ran into the same difficulty after its first great military victories outside national borders, and even its most brilliant and successful general was unable to overcome this difficulty.

Napoleon had to and could only act as a Frenchman in the decisive problems, and the question arises as to Hitler's inner relationship to the Corsican usurper, who wanted to take up the European imperial idea again under French leadership and whose external fate offered so many parallels to his own.

The meteoric rise and sudden fall of the two tyrant rulers will entice historians to make comparisons for a long time to come. Both were born outside the state whose reins they one day took in hand. Both emerged from the crowd of the nameless and unknown into the glaring light of history and, with their power, outshone everything before and beside them for one or two decades. In their dynamic race to victory, both came up against an irreconcilable opponent: England. Both waged war after war, occupying one European country after another in order to bring Britain to its knees and force it to make peace. Both suffered the collapse that sealed their fate in the most far-reaching undertaking of this policy, the campaign in Russia.

It seems that Hitler had already become aware of the danger of this historical parallel at the beginning of the campaign in the East. In the winter of 1942, Reichsleiter Bouhler asked me to put in a word at the Führer's headquarters for his biography of Napoleon, which had already been printed and whose publication had been banned at the last moment by an order from the highest authority. "I would like to wait until spring before making a decision," Hitler replied laconically when I raised the matter with him.

The failures in Russia, however, did not need to hit Hitler as devastatingly as they had hit Napoleon. Unlike Bonaparte, he had a firmly established and blindly devoted political organization and following at home and was therefore better able to afford military setbacks. Even Stalingrad was not able to significantly affect Hitler's prestige and position within Germany. The crisis of confidence following this serious catastrophe remained confined to the high military staff.

who knew what direct personal responsibility Hitler had for her.

Napoleon is reported to have discussed laws and organizational plans for the internal administration of France in the midst of battles and military camps; the constitution of the Comédie Française was decreed before Moscow. In Hitler's headquarters, too, the military briefings were more than once interrupted by visitors who lectured on cultural issues and - Hitler's hobbyhorse - developed architectural plans.

Napoleon's and Hitler's great achievements lay in works of peace. Both transformed their countries from political and economic chaos into orderly conditions and created exemplary societal and social institutions. But what they created with one hand in peace, they destroyed with the other through the excesses of their plans in war, leading their peoples to the edge of the abyss. The German people fell into the abyss. It was not Napoleon's merit, but that of his chivalrous opponents, that the French people did not suffer the same fate in 1814 and 1815 as the German people in 1945.

"Napoleon had to fail because of the provincial spirit of the European countries, because he had degraded the European countries to provinces" - I wrote in January 1940 in the introductory article to a special Napoleon issue of the "Deutsch-Französische Monatshefte". At the time, I had no idea how soon and to what extent Hitler would have the opportunity to make the same mistake.

It is pointless today to ask how a united Europe would have developed under German leadership if Hitler had been able to politically stabilize his military victory, just as it is pointless to consider what would have become of the continent if Napoleon had been able

to complete his work.

The strength of both men was rooted in the blind trust placed in them by soldierly nations and in the revolutionary enthusiasm that inspired the youth of their states. However, this strength was nationally conditioned, and therein lay their weakness for supranational tasks, even if these were recognized.

Under these circumstances, alliances always had to be a double-edged sword. "The admirers of Napoleon," said Baron vom Stein once in justification of his opposition, "the friends of tranquillity and prosperity, hope that the Emperor will realize the universal monarchy, and expect from this institution eternal peace and a great increase of human strength. The state of tranquillity, however, is not conducive to the development of the human race: eminent men were never so rare in Greece as after the subjugation of their country by the Romans; the whole of Europe never lacked them more than during the first three centuries after the fall of the Roman Republic. During this period, human forces were no longer animated by the desire to maintain national honor and independence without restriction. And yet the despotism of the Roman state rested on less firm foundations and laid its paralyzing

less emphasis on the details than that of the French emperor, in which one loses the freedom of thought, action and word and only has the right to hope for the freedom of the seas."

Hitler would have spoken no differently than Napoleon's great adversary. It may well have slipped past him once to emphasize the "cultural community of the European family of nations" in Nuremberg party speeches. When I proposed three-week home leave for the one million French prisoners of war who had not yet been released in the spring of 1942, he finally gave his approval with the remark: "The European nations have suffered such blood losses in the East that I am happy about every increase in their population. If the million French prisoners of war give life to a million more French children during their leave of absence, I would welcome that." However, Hitler rarely showed such a sense of European responsibility, and General Giraud's escape was enough to make him withdraw his approval of the French POWs' home leave, which had already been prepared in detail.

After all, Napoleon envisioned great European solutions: "Il nous faut un code europeen, une Cour de Cassation europeenne, une meme monnaie, les memes poids et mesures, les memes lois. Il faut que je fasse de tous les peuples d'Europe un meme peuple." Despite the role of European leader bestowed upon him by the circumstances of the war, Hitler's thinking was much more nationalistic. He was not a political grandson of the great Western emperors of the Middle Ages, but a son of the sectarian and un-German nationalism of the nineteenth century.

As paradoxical as it may sound: at his core, this dictator perhaps had more in common with the "resistants" who fought him than with the Europeans who had pinned their hopes on him. His secret hero was not Napoleon, but the bookseller Palm, whom Napoleon had shot in Braunau am Inn for distributing illegal publications.

It took a relatively long time for me to become clearly aware of this inner contradiction in Hitler and to realize that he could not fulfill the role that history seemed to have assigned him: to become the unifier of Europe after the unifier of the German people.

His attitude towards the French question during the Russian campaign was to open my eyes to this once and for all. Now the time had come to invite the European heads of state not to a "Princes' Day" in Erfurt, but, together with the Duce, to a "Marshals' Day" in some city in Central Europe; with the support of Petain, Franco, Horthy, Antonescu and Mannerheim, to conclude a great European alliance of protection and defense against Bolshevism on an ideological basis that was also acceptable to the non-fascist states of the continent. Instead, the imperial government stiffened its stance - especially towards France

- in an increasingly conspicuous political carte blanche.

The outbreak of war against the Soviet Union had activated and changed the internal fronts in France in such a way that it was unacceptable for Germany to remain politically inactive in the face of them.

The "attentist" circles naturally felt strengthened in their position by Russia's entry into the war; the danger of a German invasion of Great Britain was now averted in any case until American aid could become fully effective and thwart a final German victory.

Conversely, however, the "collaborationist" camp was also considerably strengthened with the start of the campaign in the east. Many Frenchmen on the right, who had probably declared their support for Marshal Petain but had remained aloof from the policy of collaboration, now came out of their reserve and considered it France's duty to join the European defensive front against Bolshevism. One of the most successful "conversions" of this kind was that of the head of the "Service d'Ordre de la Legion" in the southern zone, Joseph Darnand. He came from the "Cagoule", which had been founded during the peace to overthrow the Republic, and had distinguished himself in the war against Germany through unusual personal heroism. After the armistice, he organized the military group of the "Legion des Combatants" in unoccupied France, the "S. O. L.", from which the French militia would later emerge. Under the impression of the Western struggle for destiny that had broken out in the East, Darnand overcame his resentment against Germany and placed himself and his organization unreservedly at the disposal of the fight against communism both internally and externally.

Just a few days after the opening of hostilities in the east, tens of thousands of volunteers from all collaborationist groups, as well as from the French armistice army in the southern zone and the colonial army in French North Africa, volunteered to take part in the fight against the Soviet Union alongside the Wehrmacht. The Führer's headquarters finally gave its approval for the formation of a "Legion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme", but imposed the restriction that this French volunteer unit should not exceed divisional strength - according to a later directive, not even regimental strength - and should only be recruited from the occupied territory.

As a result of this imposed restriction, standards were applied in the mustering process that were not customary in an army even in times of peace, and the majority of the volunteers who signed up had to withdraw in disappointment. This had a particularly detrimental effect on the colonial army in North Africa, several hundred officers and several thousand men of which had already arrived in Mutterland to join the French volunteer organization against Bolshevism. When they returned to their North African garrisons without having achieved anything, they were understandably exposed to the ridicule of their Attentist and Anglophile comrades and probably felt little inclination to expose themselves once again for Franco-German cooperation.

The "Legion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme", which later took the name "Legion Tricolore", performed brilliantly in the eastern campaign according to the responsible German military officers and held its ground excellently during its first major deployment at the beginning of November 1941 near Moscow, where it was thrown into battle without any winter equipment, despite suffering heavy losses.

When the first battalion of the "Legion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme" deployed to the front in August 1941, a celebration was held in the Legion's barracks in Versailles, during which an attempt was made on the lives of Laval and Marcel Déat. An assassin named Colette, acting on an unknown mission, had sneaked into the Legion and fired several revolver shots at close range at the French Prime Minister and the leader of the Popular National Rally as they were following an invitation to visit the

barracks courtyard after the ceremony. One of the bullets hit Laval a millimeter above the heart, another pierced Deat's stomach, but neither wound proved fatal. At the moment when Laval collapsed under the shot, he offered greetings to the bystanders for his relatives and asked that the murderer be pardoned. He exclaimed: "Everything I did was for France." The failed murder in August 1941 was made up for by the provisional French government in October 1945, disregarding the patriotic motives behind Laval's actions; as far as the assassin in the Versailles barracks was concerned, Laval's wish was granted. Colette was pardoned, and he lives today enjoying the honors and distinctions that his deed deserved in the eyes of Laval's opponents.

The assassination attempt against Laval and Deat was not the first to be carried out against supporters of a Franco-German policy of understanding since the beginning of the campaign in the east. From the summer of 1941 onwards, collaborators throughout France were subjected to increasing blood terror, which could not deny its connection with the outbreak of war against Russia.

Incidentally, the French Communist Party had not waited for the outbreak of war between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union to change its front on the Franco-German question after the signing of the Moscow Agreement in August 1939. According to the observations of the German Embassy in Paris, this change of front had already taken place shortly after the armistice.

In the first few weeks after the occupation of the French capital, various functionaries, including top officials of the French Communist Party, which had been banned by French government decree, came to the embassy. They sought German support for the liberation of their party members imprisoned by Daladier and permission from the occupation authorities to re-publish a communist daily newspaper. The issues of "l'humanité", which were published illegally in leaflet form, still greeted those in some cities at the beginning of July 1940.

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festgestellt fraternization between the "German soldiers" and the "French workers". According to a report that I have not been able to verify, the invading Wehrmacht was even greeted in the suburbs of an industrial town with red flags.

Shortly after the armistice, however, the communist party leadership ceased all contact with the embassy. Rumor had it that the functionaries who had gone to German offices were disavowed and one of them was even expelled from the party. My personal interpretation of these events was that Stalin, surprised by the Reich's lightning victory in the Western campaign, now believed he had to support the Allied cause again, but that Moscow's counter-orders in this regard reached the French Communists with some delay due to the transport conditions made more difficult by the military operations.

If the relationship between the French Communists and Germany had remained at least unsettled during the first year of occupation, it went without saying that it was bound to turn into fanatical hostility when Hitler broke with Moscow and the Wehrmacht took up arms against the Soviet Union.

It was not long before the first assassinations of German officers and soldiers took place in France. The Führer's headquarters ordered the shooting of 20 to 50 and 100 hostages as reprisals for every unsolved assassination attempt. This order came into force for the first time in 1941 following the assassination of the field commander of Nantes and a senior

staff officer in Bordeaux by unknown perpetrators. On receiving this news, Marshal Petain wanted to go to the demarcation line and take himself hostage in order to save the lives of those threatened with execution.

The issue of hostage shootings was of no direct concern to the embassy, but nevertheless presented it with one of its most difficult political tasks. Controversial under international law, this measure is used by all armies without exception when circumstances demand it; a force cannot allow its members to be cowardly murdered by civilians in ambush without being punished.

However, the arrest and shooting of hostages can only be justified, if at all, if this deterrent measure reduces the risk of assassination attempts against the troops. What if, however, the perpetrators of the assassinations are intent on causing mass shootings of hostages because, in their opinion, there is too good an understanding between the population and the occupying power and because they want the hostages who have been shot to die in new, ever more numerous assassinations?

"If the English and the international Communists" - I wrote in December 1941 in a report to the Foreign Office - "establish that 100 hostages are automatically shot for each assassination attempt, the assassinations will never cease, for it will be with a minimum of effort, the

Sending a few murderers to France or dumping a few murderers in France achieved maximum political success, the stiffening of the German-French antagonism for generations to come."

On the basis of this consideration, I went so far in my protests against the hostage shootings that Ribbentrop forbade me to interfere in the matter any further, and that Keitel instructed the military commander not to inform the embassy of the measures until they had been carried out. Nevertheless, I continued my resistance; in several cases, such as the 50 hostages in Nantes and Bordeaux still scheduled for execution and the 20 hostages in Auboué, my interventions were successful at the last moment; gradually, more moderate views on this question also prevailed. Nevertheless, the measures that were actually carried out were numerous enough to cause a tremendous uproar in France. The opponents of Franco-German cooperation had achieved their goal: there was blood between the two peoples again.

There is no need to mention that foreign propaganda, influenced by anti-German sentiment, refrained from any criticism of the assassinations of Wehrmacht personnel, which violated international law, but attacked and exploited the German reprisals against these murders with the greatest vehemence.

One point of view which completely escaped the attention of the Reich government and to which I repeatedly tried to draw their attention was the great international prestige which France still possessed even as a militarily defeated country. In my reports I expressed the view that it would be difficult for Roosevelt to drag America into the war if a real agreement could be reached between Germany and France in time, and that the strong "cultural irredents" of France, in the Balkans, Holland, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries, would no longer close their minds to a European united front if France as well as Germany were involved in its leadership.

However, the Reich government and the Führer's headquarters did not attach any importance to this psychological factor. As a result, in all European countries not only the left-wing revolutionary mass of workers - which was unavoidable after the outbreak of war with the Soviet Union - but also large sections of the intelligentsia offered the Reich external and internal resistance in the defense of the West. Even countries that had officially allied themselves with Germany were only half-heartedly involved, and even

those among them who, like Finland and Romania, fought against the Red Army with all their military might and with great heroism, were not carried by the momentum of an idea shared with the Reich.

Due to its geographical location in the middle of the continent, its national strength, its organizational talent, its great military and industrial potential and, last but not least, by virtue of the universalist and federalist tradition that has remained alive in its idealism for over a thousand years

of the "First Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", the German people were the appointed leaders in the fateful struggle of the West against Asian Bolshevism. As so often in history, it fought for this pan-European task with an unparalleled spirit of sacrifice; but its political leadership did not find the slogan that would have called all Europeans to its banners and that would have been necessary to pin victory to the banner of the empire.

"Help us to help you win the war" - a French statesman told me when his attempt to enter into talks with the Reich government once again met with closed doors in Berlin. On the Eastern Front, volunteer units from almost all European countries fought shoulder to shoulder with the soldiers of the Wehrmacht with exemplary bravery. However, the National Socialist state leadership did not draw the necessary conclusions either from the offers of far-sighted Western European politicians or from the personal commitment of the members of the anti-Bolshevik legions. It did not issue the political slogan for the defence of the West that it would have needed to mobilize all the energies of the Western nations. The Eastern campaign, in which the fate of the continent was at stake, therefore ultimately remained a "European crusade" without - Europeans.

The missed preliminary peace

After the French government's note of July 14, 1941 and the Reich government's dismissive reply, the Franco-German negotiations only slowly got going again towards October.

On the basis of the "do ut des", the French colonial army in North Africa was granted some of the reinforcements provided for in the "Huntziger-Warlimont Protocol". In return, France supplied the German Africa Corps in Libya with weapons, food, fuel and motor vehicles from its North African stocks. Darlan provided the German naval command with regular position reports on British convoys in the Atlantic and gave his consent to the secret transportation of German speedboats to the Mediterranean via the Rhine-Rhone Canal. At the political level, the negotiations led to the establishment of a branch of the German embassy in Paris in Vichy and German consulates general in Casablanca and Algiers. In return, the delegation of the French government in Berlin, which had replaced the protecting power America in the care of French prisoners of war in Germany in the autumn of 1940, was granted extended rights and was also granted the status of protecting power for French civilian workers and French property. The head of this delegation, Ambassador Scapini, was officially granted diplomatic prerogatives and permission to take up residence in the French Embassy in Berlin. His delegates in the individual military districts were granted consular prerogatives.

On October 22, 1941, Petain addressed a letter to Hitler, which he asked to be seen not only as a gesture of protocol on the occasion of the first anniversary of Montoire, but also as his personal wish to emphasize the historical significance of this debate.

"Franco-German cooperation," said Marshal Petain in this letter to Hitler, "has not produced all the results that you expected and that I hoped for. It has not yet been able to shed a reassuring light in those dark regions where a wounded people is rebelling against its misfortune. Our population is suffering greatly, and the prisoners of war have not yet returned. In addition, all too much foreign propaganda is trying to create an unbridgeable gulf between the occupying power and the population.

"France, however, has preserved the memory of your generous gesture. It knows that not all its fruits will be lost.

"Their military victories over Bolshevism enable this cooperation to serve the greatness and reorganization of Europe in works of peace even more than a year ago.

"The German and French peoples have the certainty that they will find each other in this high cultural goal to which they have common hopes."

Despite the generality of the wording in this letter, Petain's intention to pick up the thread that had been broken with Berlin since the summer was evident, but a few weeks later, with Weygand's dismissal, he showed his willingness to make a concrete contribution to the resumption of fundamental negotiations with Germany.

Weygand's position in North Africa, which was comparable to that of an ancient proconsul, had been a heavy burden on Franco-German relations since the end of 1940, although the danger of this was overestimated by the Führer's headquarters.

The German Embassy in Paris took the view that General Weygand would maintain

discipline towards Vichy, and I reported on this question in April 1941:

"Weygand's plan was to turn French North Africa into the Upper Bavaria and East Prussia of the defeated French army. He is certainly hiding smaller troop contingents and weapons depots not authorized in the armistice agreement. However, he does not want to place France's military power in North Africa at England's disposal, but to use it as a means of exerting pressure in the peace negotiations if necessary."

However, as Germany's military prospects worsened with the start of the campaign in the east as a result of the war on two fronts and at the same time the United States became increasingly active in French North Africa, Weygand's independence aspirations towards Vichy also increased alarmingly. In a roundabout way via economic negotiations, he also came into very close political contact with the American diplomat Murphy and is said to have told him: "If you land with one division, I will open fire on you; if you land with thirty divisions, I will welcome you with open arms."

Even if this statement was perhaps only a fable and Weygand's loyalty to Vichy was perhaps still unquestionable, his deep-rooted hatred of Germany and Hitler's insurmountable mistrust of him were a major obstacle to the expansion of military cooperation between Germany and France in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

When, on behalf of the Reich government, I took part in the accompanying ceremonies in Vichy in mid-November 1941 for War Minister Huntziger, who had fallen on his return flight from a business trip to North Africa, I therefore also touched on the question of General Weygand's dismissal in a conversation granted to me by Marshal Petain. As the German concerns overlapped with those

After meeting various members of the Vichy government, the French head of state decided to make a change in the top command positions in North Africa. Weygand was recalled to the mother country. The civilian and military powers previously united in his hands were separated from each other and placed directly under the control of the relevant ministries again. Vichy appointed General Juin, who had been released from German captivity, as Weygand's successor in the high command of the North African colonial army.

Darlan, who had played a decisive role in this reorganization, assumed that the Reich government would now step out of its reserve, which was based not least on its mistrust of Weygand, and that the way was now clear for a fundamental discussion of the issues between Germany and France.

In fact, on December 1. December 1941, a discussion between Marshal Petain and Göring took place in St. Florentin, south of Troyes. Admiral Darlan and Ambassador de Brinon were also present on the French side. The German diplomatic service was represented only in the passive role of interpreter by Envoy Schmidt from the Foreign Office in Berlin. Marshal Petain had high hopes for the debate in St. Florentin. He knew Göring from Krakow and Belgrade, where they had both conveyed the condolences of their governments on the death of Pilsudski and King Alexander of Yugoslavia, and therefore expected a great deal from a direct exchange of views with the Reich Marshal.

However, the debate did not quite take the course he had hoped for. Göring only wanted to speak as soldier to soldier about the military issues arising from the war situation in North and West Africa. Petain, however, also raised all the political and economic issues that the French government had been raising with the Reich government for years, from the demand for a relaxation of the demarcation line, the release of prisoners of war and the

reduction of occupation costs to the objection to the level of German food rations and the separation of Alsace-Lorraine from France.

"The policy of cooperation," explained Marshal Petain, "has his approval, but the majority of the promises made by the Reich have remained unfulfilled, and he can therefore only adhere to the framework provided by the armistice agreement."

"I have conceived," continued Marshal Petain, "the policy of cooperation on the basis of equality. If there is a victor above and a vanquished below, it is no longer cooperation, but what you call a 'dictate' and we call 'la loi du plus fort'⁽⁴⁾."

"In 1919, France made the mistake of not concluding a peace of cooperation. It won the war but lost the peace. You are in danger of making the same mistake we did. You can win the war alone, but you cannot make peace alone. You can make the peace. Do not make peace without France. But if you do not conclude a peace of cooperation, you run the risk of losing it."

"Tell me, Mr. Marshal," Göring exclaimed after these explanations, "who are the victors now, you or us?" - "I have never felt more deeply how defeated France is than in this conversation," replied Petain, "but I have confidence in France's future and in its recovery."

Reichsmarschall Göring refused to accept a written summary of Petain's statements and demands. If the Führer received them in their present form, he added by way of explanation, they would do France a disservice. - Admiral Darlan, too, expressed the opinion after the debate at St. Florentin that Marshal Petain had shown himself too intransigent in it. In his opinion, it would have been more correct to "demand less in order to obtain more".

Petaín's attitude and language were explained by his disappointment with Germany's behavior during and after the events in Syria, a disappointment which he did not conceal from the Reichsmarschall. In addition, the St. Florentin debate took place at a time when the Führer's headquarters had ordered numerous hostage shootings. Petain did not fail to make a passionate appeal to his German interlocutor in this matter as well.

This also raises the question of whether it is not right for the victor and the vanquished to call a spade a spade in a debate. It is then a matter for further negotiations to find a balance of national interests acceptable to both parties. Many of the French government's demands could have been met without the slightest threat to the interests of the German war effort. Others were incompatible with the interests of the German war effort and should therefore have been rejected or at least postponed until further notice.

Even the most delicate of the questions raised by Marshal Petain, that of Alsace-Lorraine, deserved careful consideration - especially in the interests of German warfare. As the victor, Germany had the right to unite Alsace-Lorraine with the Reich. But it also had to understand that even a defeated France could not accept the loss of these territories in silence. "In contrast to the Armistice Agreement of 1918," I wrote in a report to the Reich government, "the Armistice Agreement of 1940 contains no provision on the political status of Alsace-Lorraine. A French government which would accept the measures of the German civil administration in these territories without protest would therefore be exposed to the accusation of having recognized a 'de facto' state before it had been demanded 'de jure' by the Germans."

However Petain's actions in St. Florentin were interpreted tactically, it was clear that the

French government was still committed to the principle of cooperation with Germany, but made further decisive contributions by France to the "victory of Europe" dependent on the question of what place France would be given in the subsequent "reorganization of Europe". As in its note of July 14 of the same year, the French government raised the question of a preliminary peace. In its reports, the German Embassy took the view that France should be given such a guarantee. I was also of the opinion that a pre-peace treaty should already contain far-reaching assurances for the preservation of the territorial integrity of metropolitan France and the colonial empire. The only peace of understanding concluded in recent times, the peace between Prussia and Austria in 1866, did not work to the disadvantage of the victor.

With the development of modern air and tank weapons, it no longer seemed appropriate to me to expect the Reich's military security against France to depend on the creation of a glacis - no matter how extensive - in front of the German border. Germany's military border, correctly understood, lay in the west on the Atlantic, and the security of the Reich was only guaranteed if it included France in its military defense system. In my reports, I therefore suggested to the Reich government that it should refrain from expanding its territory vis-à-vis France, but instead establish permanent bases on the Atlantic as part of a "European military alliance", in which - depending on the country's domestic political development - the German contingents would make way for French contingents. Conversely, I also suggested including French contingents in garrisons in the territory of the Reich and, in particular, providing the French navy with bases outside France, including in Kiel.

It seemed to me that peace between two soldierly nations like the German and the French could only be secured if they were so closely allied militarily that they could practically no longer wage war with each other.

However, there is no need to emphasize how important military cooperation between Germany and France would have been for the whole of Europe during the Second World War. It would certainly not have realized Victor Hugo's bombastic prophecy that the "English would be chased out to the oceans and the Russians driven out to their Asian steppes", but it would most probably have made the West unassailable on all fronts of the continent and also in the Mediterranean and North Africa. The question remains as to whether such a military alliance would have been politically achievable, whether it would have brought sufficient advantages for the German war effort to justify the renunciation of territorial annexations and economic reparations in the peace treaty, and - last but not least - whether the Reich had sufficient guarantees that a France rearmed with its approval and support would not stab it in the back.

The key to these questions lay in the French colonial empire, in the defense of which German and French interests clashed and from the defense of which, with a political concession from Germany, ever closer military cooperation between the two countries could gradually develop until a state of open war with England and America.

The tragedy was that the Reich government had never considered the Franco-German question in this context since Montoire and believed it could solve the military problems arising with France without taking its political and psychological preconditions into account.

As already mentioned, the possibilities for the defense of French North and West Africa

had also been discussed in detail in St. Florentin, and Marshal Petain had even expressed his satisfaction afterwards that he had been able to discuss this question in such detail with Goering. Just a few days later, the French government renewed its earlier proposal to "draw up a Franco-German plan for the joint defense of French North and West Africa" between specially delegated military representatives of the two countries.

The newly appointed commander-in-chief of the North African colonial army, General Juin, arrived in Berlin on December 18, 1941 to discuss this issue, which was also a wish of the Reichsmarschall. The representative of the French navy, Admiral Platon, who had also been delegated to the meeting by the Vichy government, was prevented from attending by a sudden illness. On the German side, the negotiations were led by General Warlimont as the representative of the High Command of the Wehrmacht in addition to Göring himself.

In addition to the general questions of the defense of French North and West Africa, there was a special topic of great topicality for discussion: the question of how France would behave if Rommel had to evade into Tunisian territory in his defensive operations.

Apart from its purely military aspect, this question also posed a problem in terms of international law. After a defeat inflicted on him by a third party, a victor would have had to withdraw to the territory of his vanquished and would have had to be disarmed by the authorities of a country whose disarmament was supervised by its own control commission.

Vichy cut through this Gordian knot. On December 22, 1941, the French government announced that if Rommel withdrew to Tunis, it would take the German Africa Corps in the French protectorate armed, but had ordered the North African colonial army to open fire on the advancing British.

The military situation on the Libyan theater of war had deteriorated for the Axis powers to such an extent that even Mussolini was now prepared to enter into negotiations with France and considered it advisable to open up the supply route via Tunis to the Vichy government.

secure. "If the French should not refuse even the most generous offers," he wrote to Hitler in the last days of December 1941, "I would prefer to lead my divisions and tanks to Tunis rather than see them sink into the sea on the way to Tripolitania."

On January 5, 1942, Hitler received me at headquarters in East Prussia and asked me what the consequences would be if the Italians seized Tunis and Bizerta by force. I replied that such an action would mean a breach of the armistice; it would trigger the immediate withdrawal of the French fleet and French North and West Africa and lead to the formation of a unified enemy front from Morocco to Turkey. Moreover, Germany would then be forced to occupy the entire territory of metropolitan France, which would not be possible given the small size of the occupying army in France.

Hitler agreed with me, with the proviso that the German army of occupation in France could by no means be regarded as weak. He estimated it at 38 divisions, exactly twice the number of divisions it actually comprised at that time.

Returning to the question of Tunis and Bizerta, Hitler explained that the French seemed to be prepared in principle to make this supply route available in disguised form; however, they would make their actual agreement dependent on further concessions, even though most of the agreed *quid pro quo*s had already been made on the German side. He wanted to

reserve his final position on this question and wait and see whether Rommel would be able to hold out without such help. If the British had to withdraw forces from North Africa due to the war situation in East Asia, this would mean a considerable relief for the German Africa Corps.

In the course of the conversation, Hitler explained several times that he "could not imagine anything substantial" under the term "collaboration" - his tongue literally stumbled over this word, which was also difficult to pronounce in French. In his opinion, the French wanted to wait and see how things went. If everything went well, they would get in at five minutes to twelve. If the war took a bad turn for Germany, they would switch to the enemy camp. What they expected from us at the moment was a cheque that nobody knew who would actually cash it. The program that the French had wanted to communicate to Germany was unacceptable. The Reichsmarschall had sorted it out. Moreover, this "collaboration" was a very one-sided affair, as the French interpreted it to mean that Germany should make them all kinds of concessions without being prepared to offer anything concrete in return.

Hitler recognized, however, that the French industrial potential was already having a very strong impact on the German war effort and that the French population, especially the prisoners of war and the workers, showed an astonishing degree of goodwill towards Germany for a defeated enemy. "Given the historical enmity between Germany and France," he remarked in this context, "it is indeed strange to see the attitude that the French people have adopted since the summer of 1940. There is neither a historical model nor an explanation for this."

I drew Hitler's attention to the danger that would arise if the idea of cooperation with Germany thrown into the French masses came to nothing. In my opinion, the Franco-German question could no longer be kept in abeyance. The active members of the French people would inevitably be attracted by de Gaulle's program if the policy of cooperation did not soon establish a program of action on its part. To Hitler's question whether I believed that the French people would take up arms against England, I replied in the negative, saying that they had no more inclination to do so than to resume the war against Germany. But this question was not decisive. In a battle against the Anglo-Saxons, it would primarily depend on the fleet and the colonial army. The reliability of the latter could also be regarded as guaranteed since General Juin had taken over its command and since it had been reinforced by the very anti-English troops of the Syrian campaign. Moreover, in the case of military cooperation in North Africa, the presence of Rommel's armored divisions offered a sufficient guarantee in this respect.

Wherever the French had had to fight the British since the armistice, they had done so with great determination. Djibouti, too, was still holding out, although its situation was hopeless and the women and children of the French colony were exposed to hunger and disease.

I am convinced that the North African colonial army, if only to restore French honor in arms after the defeat of 1940, would also fight the Anglo-Saxons with great bravery and, together with Rommel, would repel the British from Libya and across the Suez Canal.

I answered Hitler's question as to the French government's position on the problem of a declaration of war against England and America by saying that opinions on the subject differed widely in Vichy. Which view would prevail, however, depended not least on

Germany's political concessions and on the support that would be given to the French government willing to cooperate with Germany.

An immediate declaration of war by France on England and America does not seem possible to me, but French measures that would trigger military reactions from the Anglo-Saxon powers would. In this case, both Darlan and Petain were of the opinion that the French fleet

and colonial army would not owe the answer. Petain would regret a state of war with England and America, Darlan would deplore it.

Towards the end of the conversation, Hitler outlined the possibilities of a preliminary peace with France in the event that the theoretical concept of "collaboration" were to give way to real military cooperation between the two countries and France were to enter into an open state of war against England and America. This would immediately put Franco-German relations on a completely different footing and change the face of the current war at a stroke. The French fleet could be of immeasurable value in the fight against the Anglo-Saxons. Gibraltar would then have to fall, whether the Spanish joined in or not, and the Mediterranean would be lost to the English for good. He would then also be in a position to withdraw at least 25 divisions from France and deploy them elsewhere. The question would, of course, require careful consideration. It would have to be carefully examined whether military cooperation with France would actually work in Germany's favor; it would also have to be taken into consideration what major new demands would be placed on the Reich as a result - especially in the area of fuel, material and food supplies.

Hitler went on to say that the question of reparations could be solved by converting the French prisoners of war into civilian workers and by the French government paying the difference between their military pay and the civilian wage rate. He was not interested in money and foreign currency, and France would not be forced to transfer any foreign currency out of its country in this way. "The territorial demands of the Reich," Hitler added, "can be kept within certain limits. France will lose Alsace-Lorraine, and must come to terms with that. A solution could be found for the 'Pas-de-Calais' which would leave the land to the French and the bases to us."

"A solution to the question of the Pas-de-Calais," I replied, "is facilitated by the fact that many Frenchmen understand that there must be cannons there permanently, ready to fire on England. The collaborationist French, however, hope to be able to prove to Germany that the guarantee would be just as secure with French gunnery."

"In the colonial question, too," Hitler concluded his remarks on territorial claims, "Germany can be generous; it has little interest in overseas possessions, for its colonies are in the East. The Tunis question will be kept open until after the war; Germany need take no particular account of the Spaniards."

Following this meeting at the Führer's headquarters, the German Embassy in Paris received instructions to inform Darlan that the Führer and the Reich Foreign Minister would be available to him in the next few days for a discussion on the issues pending between the two countries. When this invitation was sent, however, the "word" "preliminary peace" was not to be uttered.

Darlan then obtained extensive negotiating powers from Marshal Petain and the cabinet in Vichy and traveled to Paris with his military officials to continue the journey to the Führer's headquarters. After his saloon train had spent several days at a Paris railroad

station, he brought the admiral and his companions back to Vichy without any further ado. Hitler had canceled the meeting at the last moment. - It was a postponement forever. After the far-reaching offers Darlan had made, and the even more far-reaching offers he had been willing to make, Hitler's decision dealt him a blow from which he never recovered. His attempt to reach an understanding with Germany had finally failed, his desire to reconquer Syria from Tunis via Libya and the Suez Canal with German support had come to nothing; he was exposed to criticism and ridicule from the Attentist circles in Vichy and throughout France.

In this case, Hitler's dismissive attitude could not have been determined by Mussolini. The Reich Foreign Minister had spoken out in favor of negotiations with France. The reasons for the refusal could therefore only be found in Hitler himself. His personal confidant, Ambassador Hewel, told me the content of a conversation he had had with Hitler in those days, which may provide some information about this. "He was reluctant," Hitler had declared in this conversation, "to negotiate with France as long as he did not have an unequivocally superior military situation in the eyes of the world. He therefore did not want to enter into talks with France under any circumstances until at least Rommel had seized the initiative in North Africa again." But didn't that mean tackling the problem at the wrong end, as talks with France would have been the prerequisite for Rommel's lasting success? For once, a convoy with supplies had reached Tripolitania unhindered, and the German Africa Corps had been able to halt the further advance of the British thanks to its success in Derna.

Since the German Embassy in Paris had worked very hard to bring about the negotiations with France, the phrase "Rommel has defeated Abetz" circulated at the time in certain Berlin milieus that believed they could solve a political issue with a bon mot. When the German Africa Army had to abandon Tunis in May 1943, General Gause, a member of Rommel's staff, admittedly said with regard to the failure of the Franco-German negotiations: "Derna, this unfortunate victory of one day, has cost us North Africa."

The Riom process

As long as there have been wars, the statesmen and military leaders responsible for them have been showered with honors in the event of victory and called to account in the event of defeat. The victors receive rank increases, gifts and triumphal processions. The defeated, depending on the country and the era, awaited the executioner's axe, the silken cord, the dungeon, political ostracism, the disgrace of the monarch, the vote of no confidence by parliament. Whereas this office of judge and avenger had hitherto been exercised by the princes or popular assemblies of the defeated states themselves, after the First World War we see the attempt, after the Second World War the implementation of a new practice: the victors take over the task from the vanquished.

After the Western campaign in 1940, the Reich government stuck to the old practice and left it to France to bring those responsible for its defeat to justice. It also refrained from exerting indirect pressure on the proceedings and refrained from filing complaints about French violations of international law. France's participation in the food blockade directed

against the Reich and in the laying of mines in Scandinavian territorial waters, the official appeals to the French civilian population to kill uniformed German paratroopers, the shooting of German pilots who had jumped from aircraft or the documented mistreatment of German prisoners of war and arrested German intelligence officers could have provided grounds for this, not to mention the French violations of international law after Versailles and during the occupation of the Rhineland and the Ruhr.

It was probably primarily due to this German non-intervention that the French government also refrained from investigating the war guilt of its predecessor in office. France had been prompted to declare war on Germany by its alliance obligations towards Poland. However, the question could have been raised as to whether the French government was compelled to renew and extend these alliance commitments after Poland's involvement in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia; whether French diplomacy encouraged Warsaw's concessions or intransigence towards Berlin's proposals when the German-Polish conflict arose; whether France was ultimately right to guarantee the immutability of a situation in Gdansk and the Corridor region in which a number of French and Anglo-Saxon politicians who were not at all pro-German had already seen the roots of the next war in 1919.

However, since Versailles unilaterally and self-righteously used the question of war guilt as the moral justification for hitherto unfamiliar political, military and economic provisions of a peace treaty, indeed made it the cornerstone of this implacable treaty work, no government is likely to decide to have its country's possible guilt for the outbreak of war publicly investigated without strong foreign pressure. The national instinct for self-preservation will forbid it to give the victor carte blanche for his peace terms.

And so it was that on July 28, 1940, thirty-five days after the armistice, the "Cour Supreme de Justice" set up by Marshal Petain did not sit in judgment on the responsibility for the war, but only on the responsibility for the inadequate preparation and poor conduct of the war.

The "Constitutional Act No. 5" of July 30, 1940 specified that the "Cour Supreme de Justice" was to replace the "Haute Cour de Justice" previously formed by the state and was to pass judgment on "ministers, former ministers or their immediate civilian and military subordinates" who were "accused of having committed crimes or offenses in the exercise or on occasion of their office or of having neglected the duties assigned to them". The jurisdiction of the "Cour Supreme de Justice" extended to "persons of all kinds who are accused of having committed attacks against the security of the state and related crimes and offenses". The "Cour Supreme de Justice" was granted a retroactive jurisdiction of ten years; it could rule on events that had taken place before the promulgation of the law authorizing it. Punishments were imposed in accordance with the first books of the Code penal, which excludes the death penalty for political crimes. There was no right of appeal against judgments of the "Cour Supreme de Justice".

After these general rulings, a decree of July 30, 1940 stipulated that the "Cour Supreme de Justice" was to investigate the "responsibilities associated with the transition from a state of peace to a state of war in September 1939". This formulation bypassed the question of war guilt without completely ignoring it. Marshal Petain expressed himself in a similar way in a radio address on October 11, 1940: "The defeat has many causes, but they are not all of a technical nature. The collapse is in reality only the repercussion of the weaknesses

and evils of the old political system on the military field. . . Political and social groups have brought France under the yoke of coalitions of economic interests, so that she could no longer pursue a foreign policy worthy of her. . . One day, in September 1939, war was declared without even daring to consult the chambers. A war that was almost lost from the outset; we neither knew how to prevent it nor how to prepare for it."

This radio address was very revealing of the direction the Vichy government was determined to give the trials. They were supposed to be Responsibilities in the military field - the new regime was headed by a marshal, and the army was also strongly represented in the leadership - distracted from responsibilities in the political field. They were somehow supposed to lead to a condemnation of the previous Third Republic and provide domestic political justification for the new system and the new rulers.

It was therefore not surprising that a single military man, General Gamelin, was summoned to appear before the "Cour Supreme de Justice" alongside ten civilians. The first to be indicted on September 5, 1940 were the former aviation ministers Pierre Cot and Guy La Chambre. They were both in the United States at the time. Guy La Chambre returned to France voluntarily to justify himself. On November 17, 1940, a communiqué from the French Ministry of the Interior announced that the aforementioned, as well as former Prime Ministers Daladier and Blum and Army Commander-in-Chief Gamelin, who were indicted shortly after them, were accused of "having violated their official duties by compromising the preparation of the national defense, whether by a policy or by decisions incompatible with the true interests of the country". At the same time, Mandel was charged with "irregularities in the management of public funds and attacks against the security of the state in Morocco" and Reynaud and two of his associates were charged with "transporting 16 million francs of government funds to Spain". Finally, on April 24, 1941, the former Secretary General of the Ministry of War and the Ministry of National Defense, Jacomet, was put on trial for violating his official duties.

As early as August 1940, the small town of Riom was chosen as the seat of the "Cour Supreme de Justice", with President Cajus as its chairman.

Whether it was because the "Cour Supreme de Justice" did not seem to offer Marshal Petain sufficient guarantees for severe punishment, or because he was interested in speeding up the pending proceedings: on August 12, 1941, he announced in a radio address that he was convening a "Conseil de Justice politique" on the basis of "Constitutional Act No. 7", which would "decide on those responsible for the defeat" and "submit proposals to him by October 15".

Indeed, on October 16, Marshal Petain addressed the public in a new radio address and announced that the "Conseil de Justice politique", composed of "elite front fighters and personalities of great merit for the common good", had proposed that Daladier, Blum, Gamelin, Mandel and Reynaud be imprisoned and Guy La Chambre and Jacomet simply interned. He had complied with these proposals.

As these measures did not have the character of preventive detention, they represented a legally questionable anticipation of the decisions of the "Cour Supreme de Justice". Marshal Petain sought to defend himself against this objection and to explain the relationship between the two courts. "The Conseil de Justice politique," he said in the same radio address, "has asked me to protect the judicial authority

from interference by the political power; such respect for the separation of the two powers is in accordance with our customary law. I have lent my ear to this appeal all the more willingly as it corresponds to my innermost convictions. Consequently, the Riom Court remains seized. I go even further; I consider that not only could the Court of Riom not be relieved of its mission, but that there is a great national interest in its being able to deliver its judgments in the shortest possible time. The charges brought against those responsible for our defeat appear to be of such gravity that no simple political sanctions can be allowed to conceal or obscure them. The negotiations will be opened. Since they concern a great trial in our history and are taking place in these troubled times, they will not be without danger. I am aware of this. But I have weighed the advantages and disadvantages for the nation and made my decisions. Delaying judgment would be tantamount to a miscarriage of justice for the country."

"Thus," continued Marshal Petain, "a first step has been taken in the justice owed to the nation. The simple completion of the judicial procedure would undoubtedly have spared me from having to apply 'Constitutional Act No. y', because if a first sanction has been imposed on the main culprits today, they will see this sanction transformed into a punishment at the end of the trial, which will perhaps be even more severe. But in the times in which we live, everyone must take their responsibilities upon themselves; I give the example: I bear mine."

After this radio address by Marshal Petain, which was not without its contradictions, it took another four months before the hearings before the "Cour Supreme de Justice" were opened on February 19, 1942. Right from the start, the legality of the "Conseil de Justice politique" and the "Cour Supreme de Justice" itself was called into question. After the indictments were read out, the President of the "Supreme Court of Justice" addressed those summoned and declared that "the decisions that have so far been made about certain of them and the reasons that have been published about these decisions are regarded by the Court as non-existent". Leon Blum, referring to his own long-standing membership of the magistracy, disputed the impartiality of the "Cour Supreme de Justice": "Do you really," he called out to the judges, "consider yourselves masters of your discretion to dismiss men from here by acquittal who have already been found guilty of the same charges by the head of state to whom you have sworn personal allegiance?" Daladier attacked Germany's breach of promise, which was to blame for the war, and used the formula that under the given circumstances "one must ask oneself whether it is not Gambetta who is under indictment and Bazaine who is in the government". The Lawyers Leon Blum and Daladier, Le Trocquer and Ribet, made unitedly sharp domestic attacks against the Vichy government. Ribet declared: "If it is still permissible to quote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, its preamble states that no one may be punished on the basis of laws that were not promulgated and legally applied before the offense was committed."

Both the defendant and the defense attorney did not fail to make any hidden points or even open outbursts against the French government in the further course of the proceedings. This can probably be attributed as much to personal moral courage and the fact that the court could not be influenced by state authority as to the internal insecurity of the Vichy system and its well-known liberalism. Marshal Petain's government liked to call itself a "national revolution", but it lacked both the revolutionary flame that makes even

unjust means seem permissible in the eyes of those who fulfill it, and the terror in which every genuine revolutionary government consequently holds its opponents. Under the Vichy regime, there was no fear in France that the president of a court would be shot down in the courtroom after the acquittal of a political defendant, that the same would happen to the witnesses for the exoneration in their homes, and that acquitted political defendants and their defense lawyers would be greeted with revolver shots in the street after leaving the court building.

Whether this is seen as a merit or a demerit, the Riom Tribunal was certainly the most unrevolutionary that turbulent times have seen. The revolutionary courts of the Jacobin regime, the courts of the Soviet Union that judged the alleged traitor generals, the People's Courts set up by National Socialism during the Second World War, knew a much harsher language on the part of the prosecution and a much more timid language on the part of the defendants and defense lawyers, and the trials conducted by the victorious powers after 1945 also offer no points of comparison with the liberal atmosphere in which the Riom trials took place.

The actual negotiations lasted from February 27 to April 4. Daladier was accused of "laxity in the preparation of national mobilization, particularly in the industrial field" and of "making false statements to the Chamber and the parliamentary commissions about the state of military preparations". Leon Blum was accused of "compromising the defence of the country through his application of labour legislation" and Gamelin of "laxity in the training of the army", "failure to exert his influence on the production of the necessary weapons" and his "disastrous organization of the high command during the hostilities". Pierre Cot was charged with "having been negligent in the construction of the air force and having supplied the Spanish Republican government with airplanes, especially modern ones, which were intended for the French air force".

Jacomot for "laxity in the placing of war orders and in the supervision of armaments production" and for "incomplete or tendentious information to his ministry and parliament, which had left them in the dark about the state of France's military preparations".

It was in the nature of these charges that the negotiations had to take on a highly technical character and often got lost in detail. To make matters worse, General Gamelin refused to answer any questions or make any statements during the entire trial for reasons of principle. The French army is called "la grande muette" in French political parlance and also in the French vernacular. Gamelin lived up to this nickname with his "great silence".

Although the negotiations on purely military issues could only be based on the testimony of subordinate military and civilian witnesses, they did provide some surprising insights, at least to the layman, into the actual combat strength of the armies in the Western campaign of 1940.

The prosecution claimed, for example, that on 1 May 1917, despite the loss of one and a half million men, 3,280,000 Frenchmen were under arms, while the number of field soldiers on 1 March 1940 was only 2,77,5,000 out of 4,8 9,5,000 mobilized. In contrast, according to an estimate from September 1939, the combat strength of the German army was over 5 million.

A witness statement by General Besson commented on this accusation by emphasizing the mutual ratio of forces in divisions. According to him, France had 110 divisions in March 1916, behind which there were 70 British, 60 Italian and 6 Belgian divisions. By

May 1940, 91 of the 115 French divisions had been deployed in the western theater of war and were supported by ten British and one Polish division, so that 102 Allied divisions stood against 130 to 140 German divisions.

Other testimonies showed that the balance of power of the armored weapon was equal and that the German superiority in battle was only due to effective tactical use. On May 10, 1940, France counted 3,625 tanks, some of which were qualitatively superior to the German tanks, in addition to 600 British tanks. At the same time, the number of German tanks was estimated at between 3,600 and 3,800.

However, the situation was considerably different for the Luftwaffe. According to the Riom witnesses, France had 3,560 operational aircraft on May 10, 1940, of which 1,730 were at frontline airports, while the total number of German aircraft was estimated at 15,700, of which 8,900 were at frontline airports.

The question of the state of armaments led to the question of arms credits; it gave Daladier the opportunity to make lengthy remarks in his defense. "What was," he asked, "the international situation in 1933? The calm, the silence, despite the lively difficulties. I concluded with Mr. Mussolini, Hitler and MacDonald signed what was then called the 'Pact of Four'⁴, and I was criticized by the whole Parliament, certainly by its majority, even though it did not want to overthrow me at that moment. It was a plan that was much criticized by my political friends that I signed with determination. I put it to a vote of confidence and succeeded in having it adopted by the House. In my opinion, this plan, if it had been maintained, could have changed the course of many things, provided, of course, that the sincerity of all the partners was the same." Daladier then mentioned the Anglo-German negotiations which had led to the proposal of a parity of German and French effectiveness at the level of 3,000,000 men, but which had been rejected by France. In the note of April 17, 1934, the Doumergue government had proclaimed that it was determined in future to arm itself and ensure its own security. However, Doumergue's Minister of War, Marshal Pétain, had reduced the national defense credits from 600 to 400 million, while Germany, in response to the note of 17 April, included an armament credit of one and a half billion in its budget. In 1936, he replied to General Colson, who had requested a loan of 9 billion from him, that this was not enough to keep Germany in line, whereupon Colson increased the demand to 14 billion with his consent.

Leon Blum confirmed Daladier's statement and recalled that he had advocated these large loans, even though he had feared that they would be devalued and had been proved right. "We brought the project before the Council of Ministers together and it was unanimously approved without a shadow of a difficulty, a fact unique in the parliamentary history of the Republic."

This unreserved advocacy of such gigantic financing of war armaments may have been a useful argument in the defendant's defense before the court in Riom. However, the socialist party leader and programmatic pacifist could lose prestige among the general public as a result of these revelations and be accused of duplicity. Leon Blum also parried this danger with great rhetorical skill. "In practical reality," he explained, "efforts to rearm and efforts to keep alive the hope of possible disarmament are by no means irreconcilable opposites. In the present world situation - since 1933, if you like - peace in Europe can only be secured through collective security and mutual assistance. There are intentions of

revenge and hegemony that can only be stopped if they are certain to be opposed by a bloc of all the nations grouped together in the pact of the international community. This certainty is only given if each of the associated nations is determined to fully fulfill its obligations to the others, to fully comply with the given signature, whatever the cost."

"The peace," continued Leon Blum, "can therefore only be maintained if every nation bravely takes the risk of war and makes the preparations to assume this risk. Hence the necessity of arming. Arm to withstand an attack against itself; arm to fulfill alliance commitments when a nation in a mutual assistance pact is attacked. Arm to satisfy the security of nations under the protection of our honor and signature. I am a man who has spent most of his public life studying these problems. I am, it seems, now a warmonger; I used to be a pacifist in the sense that I devoted years of effort and study to trying to find ways and means of preventing war and organizing Europe on the basis of collective security. But the peace we had in mind and which we hoped to organize was an indivisible peace, a peace extending over the whole of Europe and including a general and just settlement of all disputes; it was a peace based on the freedom of peoples, on respect for treaties, on the indisputable validity of all those moral concepts which prevail between peoples as between men. And on the day when these men, denounced as 'pacifists', saw that the independence of nations was threatened, that treaties had been broken, that the world was at the mercy of plans of conquest and hegemony, they came to the conclusion that, although peace was still based on collective security, collective security itself could only be based on the force of arms. The pacifists became so-called warmongers without having changed."

Leon Blum went on to mention his conversations with Schacht in September 1936, the main topic of which had been Germany's entry into negotiations on arms limitations and arms control, and continued in his defense: "When it came to disarmament issues, whether in Geneva, Paris or elsewhere, I always had only the interests of our country in mind. At the same time, I have implemented rearmament programs on such a massive scale as no one before. In both cases, I have fulfilled the duties of my office, my duties as head of government. I have fulfilled my duty as a Frenchman."

Leon Blum was also able to justify himself with a wealth of arguments on the other points of the indictment, the effects of the nationalization of the armaments factories, the strikes and the reduction of working hours on the production of weapons and munitions, and to prove that in all cases he had used his personal zeal to keep France's war preparations running at full speed. Similarly, the other defendants defended themselves in such a skilful manner that the impartial observer of the Riom trial had to ask himself why such a disorganization of the French defence system could come to light in the summer of 1940, since all those responsible had allegedly done their duty, or even more than their duty?

The negotiations also extended to the most remote individual questions of the deposition of ammunition and army effects, the nature and extent of the training of military subordinates, the allocation of weapons to the various units, the moral influence on the troops, the distribution of orders for the production of aircraft and their components. The broader and deeper the subject matter was discussed, the more it became apparent that the civilian rulers of the Third Republic had made their preparations for a major war with zeal and thoroughness. The purely military preparations did not emerge with the same clarity,

and so Vichy had failed to achieve the purpose of the Riom Trial: the politicians of the Third Republic threatened to emerge from the proceedings vindicated, but the reputation of the army and its leadership diminished.

The government of the "National Revolution" therefore decided with good reason, but perhaps too late, to postpone the trials until further notice. The Riom trials were interrupted on April 4, 1942, for which a report by the Minister of Justice Barthelemy gave the following reasons: "The responsibilities to be borne with regard to our national defense and the political and military errors committed cannot be separated from each other. In order to fully clarify the laxities of which the accused are accused, those of their political or military actions which may have constituted a criminal neglect of their official duties must also be examined more closely. It is necessary in these circumstances to obtain further information before a verdict can be reached which will satisfy justice and put minds at rest . . . This full investigation of the truth will then put an end to the pernicious campaigns which, by exaggerating or distorting the allegations of the accused, seek to divide our public opinion anew, even to the point of threatening our external security and compromising our international relations."

The dangers of a threat to France's "external security" and a compromise of its "international relations" mentioned at the beginning of this report deserve special emphasis. These fears could only relate to Germany and Italy, and the course of the Riom negotiations and the language used in them by the defendants and defenders against the authoritarian principles of the state and the Axis powers had indeed caused great displeasure in both Berlin and Rome. The Fascist and National Socialist governments forgot their own beginnings and the disappointments that had not spared them the incorruptible objectivity and respect for freedom of expression in the legal commissions of the Roman Senate or in the Reichstag fire trial in Leipzig. Nor did they draw the conclusion from the Riom fiasco that Marshal Petain's "National Revolution" must stand on very weak foundations if such a heraus-

The formal course of the trials and the alternation of speeches were seen as a game that had been set up in advance between Vichy and its apparent domestic opponents in order to show contempt for the Axis powers.

When the Riom trials were adjourned indefinitely, there was unanimity on only one point: the disappointment of all those directly and indirectly interested. The prestige of Marshal Petain's government had suffered a severe blow as a result of the proceedings; but the opposition also had every reason to be dissatisfied, as the detention measures demanded by the "Conseil de Justice politique" continued to be a worrying precedent, despite the fact that some of the defendants had been exonerated. Those sections of the French population who were sincerely willing to cooperate with Germany were bitter about the postponement of the trials and feared that this delay meant that those responsible for the Franco-German split and the outbreak of war would remain unscathed. The political circles in Germany and Italy saw the way the Riom negotiations had been handled so far and their interruption as an affront to themselves and a flirtation with the Anglo-Saxon democracies.

Riom, like December 13, 1940, thus had repercussions which, even if they were primarily on a psychological level, were to have no less detrimental effects on Franco-German relations in the political sphere in the period that followed. Since this was

certainly not the intention of Vichy, it could only be regretted that Marshal Petain's advisors had so little political instinct and so little experience in government affairs in the preparation of the indictments, in the setting of the dates, in the compilation of the incriminating material and in the overall organization of the trial, that such cheap weapons and such effective arguments had been supplied to the opposing propaganda.

The outcome of the Riom trial was probably one of the reasons that triggered the crisis in the French cabinet and led to Darlan's resignation as deputy prime minister.

One verifiable foreign policy effect was Hitler's strong disgruntlement, which manifested itself in increased mistrust of France, which he even expressed in a speech by the Reich Minister of Economics, Funk. It was due to Hitler's character that he often did not see political facts soberly in their general context, but interpreted them symbolically - often beyond their actual meaning. For him, Riom was a symbol that France, including Marshal Petain's France, did not seek rapprochement with Germany in its heart and did not regret that a new war had broken out between the two countries in 1939, but only that it had been defeated in this war. If December 13 had already dealt a heavy blow to Hitler's intentions of reaching an understanding with France, it can be said that Riom practically brought about the final renunciation of such intentions.

The second Laval cabinet

Darlan himself need not have been particularly affected by the major domestic political crisis that the Riom trial triggered in France. The "Cour Supreme de Justice" and its proceedings were not due to the Admiral, just as the fleet, the only French military unit to emerge undefeated from the war with Germany, had been kept beyond criticism in Riom.

Nevertheless, the unsatisfactory outcome of the trials before the "Cour Supreme de Justice" was blamed on the incumbent head of cabinet and interpreted as proof of a lack of ability to manage government affairs. The failure of the negotiations with the imperial government and the hoped-for clarification of many vital issues for France was also attributed to the admiral as a personal failure. The forthcoming change of cabinet in Vichy in the spring of 1942 was the talk of the town, and the question was no longer whether Darlan would resign, but only who Petain would appoint to replace him.

While various new ministerial lists were being discussed, the world public was surprised by a radio statement by Roosevelt in which he announced that the United States would have to regard Laval's re-entry into the government as a threat to its good relations with France. In his intentions, the American president unintentionally clashed with the Reich government. It, too, considered it undesirable for Laval to rejoin the cabinet, and the German embassy in Paris had only recently been instructed again to this effect. Of course, this did not prevent Berlin from polemicizing vehemently against American interference in French domestic affairs. Vichy was thus caught between two fires by Roosevelt's radio statement. While the Allies had been constantly accusing it of yielding too readily to German pressure for years, if Laval did not join the government, it now also ran the risk of being accused by its own supporters and the Axis powers of listening to America. Roosevelt's radio declaration thus had the opposite effect to that intended: instead of preventing a new Laval cabinet, it prepared the ground for it psychologically. A simultaneous push by Göring against Laval's re-entry into the government was then -

strange duplicity of events - to practically trigger the second Laval cabinet.

At the beginning of April 1942, the Reichsmarschall was in private conversation with

Laval spoke in Paris about the great disgruntlement that the Riom process had caused in Berlin. Under the impression of the disappointments caused by the policy of understanding, the German government had now decided to take a much tougher line in France. Laval had been an honest opponent of Germany in the past; one could therefore also have confidence in his current policy of friendship. But it was precisely this trust that made it his duty, the Imperial Marshal, to warn Laval urgently against joining the government at the present time. Perhaps his political hour would come again after the conclusion of the war and the peace treaty; until then, he could only be strongly advised against taking over the reins of government.

It is a testament to President Laval's patriotism that he was not deterred by this warning from Göring, but on the contrary was determined to offer Marshal Petain his cooperation in the government once again. Before the conversation with Göring, he had been hesitant and basically unwilling to take on the difficult and thankless task of leading the government again; the threat contained in the words of the Reich Marshal to France brought his decision to full maturity. If his absence from the German government was desirable for the adoption of great measures, his presence in the government could perhaps prevent these measures, or at least take the edge off them. His duty as a Frenchman was therefore to draw a definitive line under December 13.

On April 18, 1942, Vichy issued the following press communiqué: "Marshal Petain, in talks with Admiral Darlan and Pierre Laval, has conducted a general review of the political situation. On the basis of this exchange of views, the Head of State has come to the conclusion that the present form of government no longer meets the requirements of French foreign and domestic policy.

Taking into account the special position of the naval commander Darlan as the predestined successor to the Head of State, Marshal Petain has entrusted him with the supreme command of the land, sea and air forces. In these capacities, the Admiral will attend the meetings of the Council of Ministers to the extent that issues falling within his competence are discussed.

In order to ensure a more effective and energetic management of government affairs, the Head of State has taken a second decision, the creation of the post of Head of Government. President Laval will exercise this function under the high authority of the Head of State, to whom he will be responsible and to whom he will be accountable for his actions. His duties will include proposing ministers to the Head of State and obtaining his approval for their appointment. He will be responsible for the actual management of France's foreign and domestic policy.

In addition to presiding over the government, President Laval is also in charge of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Information."

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In the Foreign Ministry, Laval appointed Ambassador Rochat, for many years head of the European Department of the Quai d'Orsay, as Secretary of State; he entrusted the Secretariat of State for Information to Bonnafeux, the owner of the Clermont-Ferrand printing works and newspaper, who was personally close to him. The administrative area of the Ministry of the Interior was taken over by the Prefect Hilaire, who later took charge of the General Secretariat of Fine Arts; the General Secretariat of Police was transferred to the former Prefect of the Aisne Department, Bousquet. Otherwise, Laval essentially retained Darlan's staff, but the economic departments were somewhat consolidated under

the Minister of Agriculture and Finance, Cathala, a close friend of his.

After the cabinet had been formed, Laval sent the following letter to the Reich Foreign Minister on May 12, 1942:

"I have assumed responsibility for the conduct of French policy under the high authority of Marshal Petain at a difficult moment. You are not unaware of the relations I would like to see established between our two countries; they can only be built on loyalty and trust.

The French know that I intend to seek and exhaust all means to achieve reconciliation and a close understanding with Germany. The French also know that our understanding will ensure future peace, and under these circumstances I am certain that France will find a place in the new Europe worthy of its past.

To save Europe from a Bolshevization that would destroy our culture down to its roots, Germany is ready for a gigantic battle. The blood of its youth will flow. I would like to assure you that the French government is not indifferent to the enormous sacrifices that your people are voluntarily making. In our misfortune, I would like to assure you without hesitation that France is willing to contribute to your efforts within the limits of its possibilities and without any hesitation.

Germany has called the youngest and most active elements of its people to arms for the greatest battle in history. It is therefore short of men; I understand this difficulty and am ready to do my part to overcome it. My wish is that as many Frenchmen as possible should take the jobs in your factories of those who are going to the front. The French are attached to their soil, but I know that they will tear themselves away from it when they are made aware of the historical and national importance of their task. Help me to create a psychological climate that will facilitate my action.

France is symbolically represented on the eastern front by its anti-Bolshevik legion. It could be strengthened, and the French government will ensure that all present and future volunteers, as well as their families, have their interests protected as they deserve.

I ask Your Excellency to present this letter to the Führer as proof of the sincerity of the French government."

The resumption of government business by Laval could have given new impetus to Franco-German understanding policy in many areas if the imperial government had seized the opportunity. The new cabinet was also able to secure stronger domestic political backing in metropolitan France for military cooperation with Darlan in the Mediterranean and North Africa. A poll conducted according to the Gallup Institute method showed that 40% of the population were in favor of Laval rejoining the cabinet and 15% against, while the remaining 45% abstained or said they would judge the new government by its actions. Laval convened meetings at short intervals with the leading officials of the prefectural administration, the leading officers of the armistice army, the mayors, teachers and other professionals, in which he personally explained his views on the Franco-German question; in most cases, he met with a surprisingly high degree of understanding. The re-establishment of departmental representations was also not unsuitable for ensuring that Vichy regained greater popularity in those circles of the province that were hostile to his authoritarian endeavors.

But Berlin had conspired to nip these hopeful and last attempts at a constructive policy with France in the bud, and if the new Laval cabinet was received by the Allies as expected after Roosevelt's radio statement, the Axis powers also met it with anything but goodwill. I was in the Führer's headquarters at the time of the change of cabinet and was thus an on-

the-spot witness to the displeasure at the decision taken in Vichy. Unaware of the Reich government's dispositions, Count Ciano noted in his diary on April 15, 1942: "Laval has taken over the leadership of the French government; this is the result of protracted intrigues that the Germans have forged behind our backs." The Italian Foreign Minister followed up this entry with the question: "What promises were made to the French to achieve this result - and at whose expense?" In order to leave no doubt about the immutability of the Italian territorial claims, the Fascist press, radio and poster propaganda promptly orchestrated Laval's accession to power with a doubled and tripled Nice, Savoy, Corsica and Tunisia campaign.

As if by chance, after a year and a half of silence, Gauleiter Bürckel also spoke out again and suddenly announced new massive expulsions of Lorraine citizens in an article in the "Frankfurter Zeitung" on April 24.

But the second Laval cabinet was to be dealt the heaviest blow by an event that broke its momentum right at the start and made unimaginable waves in the Führer's headquarters: General Giraud's escape.

As a young captain, Giraud had already been wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans during the First World War. With the help of a French nurse admitted to his military hospital, he managed to escape and make his way to Belgium. In Brussels, Miss Cavell's espionage organization helped him to escape to Holland. In this context, the question may be raised as to whether German nurses were also allowed to work in French and English military hospitals close to the front.

During the Rif War, Giraud distinguished himself through personal bravery in the skirmishes against Abd el Krim, which earned him the reputation of a dashing troop leader in the North African colonial army.

Before the Second World War, Giraud was Commanding General of Metz for a long time, where Colonel de Gaulle was under his command. Even then, however, the relationship between the two officers was not the best; the general was also unsympathetic to his subordinate's military policy paper, which pointed out the importance of modern armored weapons and called for a larger contingent of professional soldiers in the French army.

On May 19, 1940, General Giraud drove to the headquarters of the 9th Army, which was newly subordinated to his command, without knowing that it was already occupied by the Wehrmacht. The German officers who received him with exquisite courtesy drew his attention to the fact that the German tanks had already pushed through to Abb-"e"-ville. "They say Abb-,,e"-ville," the Frenchman, who was also careful to maintain his language at this moment, instructed his foreign interlocutors, who, of course, had not exactly come to France to study the language.

The comic nature of the capture would have stung even a less vain general than Giraud. Reminiscences of the successful escape of his youth may have played their part; in any case, the general interned at Königstein Fortress had no other idea than to escape and resume the battle with Germany, in which he had not won any laurels in May 1940. The German embassy in Paris had already learned of these escape plans in the fall of 1941 and had informed the relevant military authorities in Germany.

Contrary to the widespread opinion in Berlin, which was also shared by the Führer, Giraud had not given his word of honor on the Königstein that he would not escape. However, the unabashed preparations for his escape required a generosity in the supervision of his sleeping quarters, his walks and his mail that would have been

unimaginable in France towards German prisoners of war, even those of corresponding military rank.

The escape itself took place in the morning hours of April 17, 1942, between two roundels, using a cable secretly made by Giraud, with which he lowered himself down the 40-metre-high fortress wall during a walk. The athletic feat was worthy of recognition for a sixty-year-old, and a member of the French government

He then remarked that it would have been desirable for France if the strategic skills of its generals had been on a par with their gymnastic abilities. At the foot of the Königstein, civilian clothes and false papers were ready for Giraud, and his foreign helpers had even provided him with a car and a driver's license. The escape was greatly facilitated by the fact that the searches began two days later than planned, as the occurrence had not been reported immediately. By the time the press and radio brought the fugitive's personal description, he was already close to the Swiss border, which he crossed from Alsace on April 22. On April 28, he was received by Marshal Petain in Vichy.

General Giraud was exercising the good right of every prisoner of war when he escaped from the Königstein; he was also not the first French general to succeed in an escape attempt since the armistice of 1940. Nevertheless, as a result of a series of circumstances, this event made waves in the Führer's headquarters that could only be compared to the excitement over December 13 and the outcome of the Riom trial.

Before the war, Hitler had read the translation of de Gaulle's "Vers une armée de métier", published by a Potsdam publishing house under the title "France's shock army". The book had made a strong impression on him, but in his memory he had confused the author with Giraud. He therefore believed that Giraud was the most capable commander not only of the French army, but of the entire Allied camp. As already mentioned, Hitler also believed that Giraud had given his word of honor not to escape and had therefore broken his word. After all, he was convinced - and his suspicions were not to deceive him - that the general had been planning for some time to make common cause with the enemies of the Axis powers in North Africa. On May 1, I received Hitler's personal and most urgent order to persuade General Giraud to return voluntarily to German captivity via Marshal Petain's government.

I also had a very strong personal interest in the success of this mission. During a recent visit to the Führer's headquarters, after considerable initial difficulties, I had succeeded in obtaining Hitler's agreement to grant home leave for the French prisoners of war. Hitler had already instructed Keitel to have the Wehrmacht railroad commissioners prepare timetables to such an extent that about one million French prisoners of war could have spent a three-week vacation in France over the next nine months. If General Giraud refused to return to Germany voluntarily, it was to be feared that Hitler would withdraw his consent and also revoke other benefits already granted to the French prisoners of war.

As I was in a hurry, I met with Laval and Darlan on May 2 in Moulins, on the demarcation line, to discuss the arrival and departure of the opportunity to negotiate. I particularly emphasized the important interests of the French prisoners of war that were at stake. Laval and Darlan then returned to Vichy to bring this point home to Giraud. In the afternoon Laval called me from Vichy in Moulins and told me that Giraud was insisting on his refusal; he therefore suggested that I should personally explain to the general the compelling reasons for his voluntary return to Germany. I agreed to this proposal, and in the late afternoon hours Giraud, accompanied by Laval and Darlan,

crossed the demarcation line into the occupied territory.

The meetings took place in the offices of the German divisional staff in Moulins, whose commander, General Marcks, also took part at my request. I hoped that the participation of the German general, who had been severely wounded on the Eastern Front and had been awarded the Knight's Cross, would have a special effect on Giraud. But General Marcks' appeal to the military sense of responsibility and comradeship towards the French prisoners of war met with just as little understanding as my personal arguments.

Giraud explained that he could not imagine that his person would be given such importance in Germany that his escape could have any unpleasant consequences for the French prisoners of war in the empire and for Germany's relations with France; he gave the solemn assurance that he would withdraw completely into private life ("put on his slippers") and would not take the slightest hostile action against Germany. He was aware of only one case in which a prisoner of war had voluntarily returned to captivity, that of the Roman Regulus, who, as is well known, had not ended well in Carthage.

I replied to Giraud that no barrel of nails awaited him in Berlin, but an apartment in the Hotel Adlon; given Hitler's mentality, the gesture of his voluntary return could have unforeseen effects on improving Franco-German relations. I was not authorized to give him any binding assurances, but I was convinced that after his return he would practically no longer be regarded as a prisoner of war, but would be able to render extremely valuable services to his fellow prisoners of war in the Berlin delegation because of the aura that would then surround him. It was also conceivable, for example, that he could take over the management of the aspirant camp in Königsberg and thus exert a decisive influence on the intellectual and moral formation of the future French officer corps.

Giraud rejected my suggestions as unacceptable. In the Berlin delegation for French prisoners of war, he could only participate in the first, but not in a subordinate position; as far as the aspirant camp in Königsberg was concerned, it was impossible for him, "General d'Armee", to take over a function that had previously been held by a divisional general.

It was difficult to decide whether Giraud's objections were an expression of exaggerated vanity or merely pretexts,

The attempt to persuade him to return to Germany voluntarily had to be regarded as a failure. General Marcks, who had confirmed and emphasized my explanations from his military point of view, invited us to dinner in his staff restaurant. Afterwards, Laval and Darlan drove back across the demarcation line to Vichy with Giraud.

On the following day, May 3, I reported to the Reich government that, contrary to the widespread opinion in Germany, I had not gained the impression of Giraud as a man of unusual importance. "But since," I continued, "despite the very strict surveillance ordered by Laval and despite his declaration of loyalty, he represents a danger to us, his return to Germany would have to be achieved by other means." I made the - albeit somewhat platonic - proposal to have Giraud tested by a reliable pilot on a flight to Vichy with the help of the French government; if he accepted the pilot's offer to take him to North Africa in order to unleash an insurrectionary movement, the plane should fly away and make an emergency landing in occupied territory; if Giraud refused the offer, the plane should drop him off in Vichy, as there would then be no reason to doubt his loyalty. I also suggested that the Reich government should suggest to Marshal Petain that, in the interests of the French prisoners of war, he should give General Giraud, as his military subordinate, the military order to return to Germany voluntarily. However, on May 6, the German Embassy

in Paris was instructed to no longer deal with the Giraud matter, which was only to be handled by the Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden.

On May 2, I had not expressly given General Giraud my word of honor for a free escort for his stay in the occupied territory. In response to Laval's question from Vichy as to whether the General could return to the unoccupied territory unhindered in the event of a negative outcome to the talks, I had only replied to the French Prime Minister that this was a matter of course, and after the failure of the negotiations I acted accordingly.

The Führer's headquarters, informed of the course of the conversation, did not take the same view, and Field Marshal Keitel took the opportunity to accuse me to Hitler that I had resisted Giraud's arrest in Moulins and had caused the bridge guards at the demarcation line to let Giraud pass, contrary to the military orders given to them. On May 3, Hitler requested a report from the Reich Foreign Minister on the "pressure" I had exerted in this regard.

My attitude in this matter was all the more resented at the Führer's headquarters as Giraud subsequently showed fewer scruples. He did not keep the solemn assurance he had given in Moulins and broke the word of honor he had given Marshal Petain, both verbally and in writing, to refrain from any hostile action.

blessed act against Germany. When I was called to Munich to report after the Anglo-American landing in North Africa on 10 November, Hitler received me in the Führerbau with the words: "Why did you let Giraud go, this one general outweighs thirty divisions." The fact that in Moulins I had adhered to surviving terms of honor, while Giraud had gone beyond them by secretly embarking for Casablanca, was to be one of the main reasons for the disgrace into which I fell with Hitler in November 1942.

Whether General Giraud's escape from the Königstein fortress was causally linked to Laval's re-entry into government has never been fully clarified. The chronological sequence of the two events would suggest such an assumption, but a connection between them has been claimed and denied just as often. But even if the circles of the Deuxieme Bureau, which had prepared and managed General Giraud's escape from German captivity, did not intend to put the Laval cabinet in a difficult position vis-à-vis Germany as soon as it was formed, their efforts certainly led to this result in practice. Giraud's departure from Königstein was the "grain of sand in the machine" that finally brought Franco-German rapprochement efforts to a standstill. The fears I had expressed in Moulins about the impact on French prisoners of war in Germany were also to prove all too soon and all too true.

On May 5, 1942, the German Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden notified the French government:

"Since General Giraud has taken advantage of the benefits granted to French prisoners of war in general and to him in particular in order to carry out his escape, the High Command of the Wehrmacht feels compelled to take the following measures:

1. All relief in the statute for French prisoners of war is revoked.
2. All privileges of a personal nature, all consideration for the situation of families, all individual releases, social concessions of any kind as well as permits to visit close relatives are abolished.
3. Vacation is out of the question and will no longer be granted in individual cases, whatever the particular reasons may be.
4. The French generals who were prisoners of war in Germany were transferred to fortresses and guarded in isolated casemates.

5. Other measures are reserved for later."

The home leave of one million French prisoners of war, which had already been prepared in all its technical details, had thus been brought down by Giraud; Hitler even ordered that the transports of sick French prisoners of war to France should be stopped, and it took several months before the French prisoner of war camps in Germany slowly regained possession of the privileges granted to them before the general's escape.

The psychological and political effects of this setback, both in the prisoner-of-war camps themselves and among their families in France, are easy to imagine; General Giraud's subsequent strategically insignificant efforts in North Africa, not his escape from Königstein, dealt a devastating blow to Franco-German understanding, which - depending on the observer's point of view - may be counted as a great merit or a heavy debt.

On May 23, 1942, during a meeting in Paris, Laval told me that "he was well aware that Germany had not promised him any relief when he joined the government. However, it was painful for him to realize that his task was being made more difficult for him in many respects than for his predecessors".

On May 26, Ribbentrop replied to the letter he had received from the newly appointed French Prime Minister at the beginning of the month. The Reich Foreign Minister acknowledged Laval's intention to establish better relations between the two countries and his expressed understanding of the European significance of Germany's struggle against the Soviet Union. "However," Ribbentrop explained in his reply, "I cannot conceal the fact that the Reich Government has had to convince itself in the time that has elapsed since the armistice that a very large number of Frenchmen still completely misjudge the given situation. The generous policy with which the Führer in Montoire extended his hand of reconciliation to the French people after the defeat of his army did not meet with the response in France that might rightly have been expected and that the situation of France and French interests would have demanded. After these experiences, it is natural that in future the Imperial Government will no longer allow itself to be determined in its decisions towards France by hopes and promises, but only by the deeds of French policy. I believe that Your Excellency will not ignore the necessity of this attitude."

The "deeds" of French policy, which were to exclusively determine the Reich government's behavior towards France in the future, were outlined over the coming weeks and months by numerous special representatives of Berlin Reich offices, who made additional demands of Laval in Paris. State Secretary Backe presented a plan for food supplies that substantially increased the previous rates and doubled them in some sectors. The Reich Ministers Speer and Dörpmüller and Field Marshal Milch demanded that, in addition to the levies already paid, a thousand French **locomotives** and thirty thousand freight wagons be withdrawn from service and **2,500 km** of railway tracks, together with the associated points and signaling equipment, **be dismantled** and transported to Germany. State Councillor Schieber presented a program for powder production, which in the unoccupied

area made the additional recruitment of 35,000 workers necessary. In his capacity as Reich Commissioner for Civil Shipping, Gauleiter Kaufmann demanded the chartering of French and neutral merchant steamers with a total capacity of 200,000 tons in French Mediterranean ports.

Laval met these German demands without much hesitation because he hoped that such concessions would speed up the resumption of political contact with the Reich government.

Initially, he also sought to satisfy Gauleiter Sauckel's demand for a further 3,500,000 French workers for Germany, although he was aware from the outset of the serious domestic political consequences of fulfilling this particular demand. By the time of Sauckel's first visit to Paris in the summer of 1942, 180,000 French workers had volunteered for Germany - not least thanks to the support that the German recruitment agencies had received from the French government - and were working in the German factories to the great satisfaction of the management. This result of recruitment on a voluntary basis could easily have been doubled or tripled over the next one or two years, especially if the time-limited contracts of the first voluntary workers had been honored and those voluntary French workers who wanted to make use of their right to contract had not been forcibly held back in Germany.

Like many leading figures in the Third Reich, however, Sauckel believed he could easily apply the laws enacted within Germany and for Germany to the occupied territories and to foreigners, and by virtue of the powers granted to him by Hitler in France, he ordered the compulsory long-term deployment of labor to Germany. It took the most urgent representations from the embassy and the German occupation authorities in Paris to convince the Gauleiter that, in a country such as France, which still had its own government, he must first and foremost make contact with the local government itself when taking such drastic measures.

This led to Vichy's involvement. As Laval wanted to conduct the negotiations with Sauckel himself and meetings in which the French head of government took part in person had to be held in the embassy for reasons of protocol, I attended the meetings, which dragged on for several days, as host. Laval - who still had the bullet from the Versailles assassination over his heart - became so agitated during one of the discussions with Sauckel that he suffered a fainting fit in the middle of a sentence and the meeting had to be interrupted.

The French Prime Minister reminded the Reich Plenipotentiary for Labor Deployment of the disastrous consequences that the forced recruitment he had demanded would have throughout France. The people affected by this measure would be forced to work before being deported to Germany.

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leave their jobs and homes en masse and thus run the risk of being recruited by the resistance movement sooner or later. A French government that carried out forced conscription for labor deployment in Germany would have to lose the last political credit in its country, and this could not be in the interest of the German occupying power in the interest of the security of its army. He was known to want honest cooperation with Germany and was also prepared to allow his country to contribute to the German war effort to the best of its ability; however, the contribution he was demanding here exceeded the

limits of what was possible and could not be provided by France.

Sauckel replied that the war situation was forcing Germany to deploy foreign workers to the greatest extent and in the greatest haste. The losses in the past Russian winter and the new offensive operations of the eastern campaign had led to the withdrawal of hundreds of thousands of first-class German workers who had previously been released for the purposes of the war economy; replacements had to be found urgently. The occupied territories in the east and south-east, as predominantly agricultural countries, would not be suitable for this, but the industrialized countries of western Europe would, and among them France, with its large population and wealth of highly qualified skilled workers, would be. He could therefore not abandon his demand for 15,000 specialists and 200,000 other French workers, especially as it was already far below his estimate and represented only a fraction of what he calculated France could provide in terms of labor without endangering domestic production.

A compromise was finally reached. The French government wanted to try to recruit the required 3 500 000 workers on a voluntary basis by intensifying advertising; if voluntary recruitment did not reach this number, workers in the various factories were to be made obliged to register for work in Germany by individual designation. Sauckel renounced the introduction of compulsory labor service in France according to the German model; he promised to convert one French prisoner of war into a civilian worker for every ordinary worker arriving and to release one French prisoner of war to France for every five specialists sent to Germany.

No one could deny that the German war economy had a very large and very urgent need for foreign labor and that, from a purely technical point of view, it was possible for France to extract a considerable number of both skilled and unskilled workers from its production. What Sauckel was fundamentally wrong about, however, was that France was not Germany. He could just as easily have said that the Wehrmacht needed hundreds of thousands of additional soldiers, France had enough men fit for military service, let's mobilize them.

Such solutions would have been possible to the greatest extent - due to their voluntary nature - if a political agreement had been reached between the two countries. However, despite Vichy's insistence, the imperial government had persistently avoided such an agreement; two years after the armistice, France still did not know what place it had been given in the "new European order" and whether a German victory would not seal its own defeat.

Another of Sauckel's errors was that he disregarded the political attitudes of the classes to whom his recruitment measures were primarily directed. In a large part of the French working class, sympathies for the Soviet Union were so deeply rooted that, for party-political reasons alone, they could not wish for Berlin's victory over Moscow, but only for Moscow's victory over Berlin. In order to win it over, it would therefore have had to be given strong social compensations, which National Socialist Germany in particular would not have been at a loss for.

When Sauckel entered the embassy, I once quoted the words of Goethe's Faust, who was approaching his end but not looking forward to it:

"Workers he creates multitude upon multitude, He
seduces by pleasure and severity, And every
evening I will have news."

These Goethean verses contained - up to the daily "Vollzugsmeldung" - an astonishing anticipation of the tasks and methods of Hitler's General Commissioner for Labor. Sauckel's only problem was with "enjoyment", because even if the Western European workers in the Reich received wages that were a little higher than at home, the accommodation, food and clothing options provided by the war were below their usual standard of living.

However, Gauleiter Sauckel belonged to that class of people who, having reached leading positions, believe they are exempt from any accusation of antisocial behavior simply because they themselves once belonged to the working class of society. In order to offer the greatest possible "incentive" to work in Germany, he ordered a general wage freeze in France. The price freeze, however, which should have accompanied such a not unreasonable measure in order to justify it, failed to materialize. The prices of all essential items were constantly rising - not least as a result of the official toleration and use of the black market by German authorities. Thus a disproportion between wages and prices quickly developed, which contributed more to the political radicalization of the French workers than all the communist propaganda and which must have led to their increasing hostility towards the German occupying power.

"It is regrettable" - I wrote in April 1942 in a report to the Reichsregierung - "that the French industrialists, without being won over to our cause, are making huge profits from our orders.

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While in many working families, the entire weekly wage is not enough to pay the very meagre living allowances due to the wage freeze imposed by us."

It is not uninteresting to counter my report with a statement that Göring made in Berlin on August 6 of the same year to the heads of the German offices in the occupied territories:

"The population is gorging itself in this France, it's a disgrace. I've seen villages where they walk in rows with their long white loaves under their arms. I've seen baskets of oranges in small villages, fresh dates from North Africa. The normal diet in these areas is pushing, the card is the extra that people get. It's the only way people in France can be so happy."

Although the Reichsmarschall's comments were rhetorically exaggerated, they were accurate in some respects. Part of the French population

especially the rural population - actually lived much better than the German population in terms of food in the occupied territory. In the agriculturally less fertile unoccupied territory, however, famine was almost rife in some areas shortly after the armistice. The strong self-sufficiency efforts of the individual departments, the great scarcity of means of transport and the lack of organization in France in the face of such problems, even in times of peace, meant that in various places the respective soil products were available in abundance, while they were completely lacking in the immediate vicinity.

In the industrial centers, however, the nutritional situation of the working classes and large sections of the middle classes was in any case much worse than in Germany. The numerous visitors from the Reich, who subsequently declared in Berlin that people "dined better in France than in peacetime", would have done well to form their opinion not only in the luxury restaurants in Paris, which had been exempted from the brand management by express order of the Reich Marshal, but also to check early in the morning on the subway or in the suburban trains what the cooking utensils of the workers traveling to their factories

contained - and did not contain.

"But this is not just about food," Göring continued in his aforementioned speech of August 6, 1942, "but I have said so and so often that I regard the whole of France, which we have occupied today, as a conquered territory. In the past, things seemed relatively simpler to me. Then it was up to the conqueror to take away what was conquered. Only Mr. Abetz does collaboration, remember that. I do not collaborate. I only see collaboration on the part of the Frenchmen in the following: if they deliver until they can no longer do so themselves; if they do it voluntarily, then I will say I am collaborating. If they eat up everything themselves, then they are not collaborating, then this must be made clear to the French. Let there be an inflation that will make a splash... Then perhaps France will be hit the way we want to hit France."

These impulsive statements by Göring were based on a justified concern about the food situation of the German people, and were also partly due to personal annoyance. In July 1942, in agreement with State Secretary Backe of the Ministry of Food and State Secretary Körner of the Four-Year Plan, the French food rations to Germany had not been increased to the extent prescribed by Göring. But even taking these motives into account as far as possible, there was no doubt that no bridge could be found between the Reich Marshal's views and the political line that the embassy was trying to uphold.

Göring was by no means alone in his views. At the beginning of the summer of 1942, there were more and more visitors from party, Wehrmacht and state circles in Paris who openly declared to anyone who would listen that the Reich government had long since abandoned the "policy of collaboration" with France. When French North Africa joined the Allies in November 1942 and Vichy's reactions lacked the desired energy, the same personalities then declared that this was a failure of the "collaboration policy", a policy which, in their own words, had not been pursued by Berlin for years.

For the time being, however, the military situation was still such that the French believed they could calmly dispense with political and psychological considerations. Sebastopol had fallen, the German armor was approaching Stalingrad and the Caspian Sea, the German battle flag was flying from the heights of the Caucasus, Rommel was at the gates of Alexandria.

The goddess of victory once again smiled on the German cause during the Anglo-Saxon operation on Dieppe, whose strategic objectives were greatly exaggerated by Berlin propaganda. The loyal conduct of the Dieppe population during the defence against the English attack prompted the Führer's headquarters to release all the prisoners of war from this town as well as from some neighboring rural towns; however, Hitler did not reply to a written offer made to him on August 21, 1942 by Marshal Petain under the impression of Dieppe to also deploy French forces in the defence against possible future attacks on metropolitan France. Six months were to pass without Hitler and Ribbentrop responding to Laval's request, made when he took office and repeated almost weekly since then, for the two governments to enter into fundamental talks.

During the Seven Years War, Bismarck once recalled that the Roman god of war Janus had two faces, one military and one political.

The more the Second World War dragged on, the more the political leadership of National Socialist Germany relied solely on the military card. When setbacks occurred in all theaters of war in the fall of 1942, the enemies of the Reich also held the political trump cards.

The neglected theater of war

When the first news of the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa reached the Führer's headquarters on November 8, 1942, Hitler instructed the German embassy in Paris to convey the following offer to the French government as quickly as possible:

"The Führer asks whether the French Government is seriously prepared to fight with Germany against the English and the Americans. This would require, beyond the breaking off of relations, the declaration of war against the English and Americans. If the French Government unequivocally agrees, Germany is prepared to go through thick and thin with her." This offer came 24 hours, if not 24 months, too late. When the Anglo-American navy arrived off Morocco and Algiers and its first landing corps gained a foothold on North African soil, none of the military and political problems between Germany and France had been resolved, the clarification of which would have been essential for the material defense capability and moral defense readiness of French North Africa.

Since the armistice, Franco-German relations had been so closely linked to the issues of warfare in the Mediterranean and North Africa that the interest the Reich government paid to its relations with France was at the same time a measure of the importance it attached to these operational areas. The fact that Hitler, after the brief attempt at Montoire, never again entered into a fundamental discussion of the Franco-German question; the oddity that Ribbentrop was the only Reich minister who never came to Paris during the occupation; the fact, finally, that Berlin made no attempt to soften the harshly anti-French course - all indicate that the southern front of "Fortress Europe" had not been recognized in its strategic importance at the Führer's headquarters.

Hitler repeatedly emphasized, both at the time of the armistice and during the following years, the great dangers that the seizure of French North Africa and the complete domination of the Mediterranean by the Anglo-Saxons would entail for the warfare of the Axis powers; the nervousness with which he had followed the appointment of Weygand as commander-in-chief of the French colonial army and the escape of General Giraud from German captivity can be explained by this concern. Hitler had also personally negotiated with Franco about ousting the English from Gibraltar, had spent several days thinking about a

military coup d'état on Cyprus, had the preparations for the conquest of Malta carried out and also paid attention to the operations of the German air force to block the Suez Canal. Nevertheless, Hitler was clearly only half-hearted in these undertakings and plans and did not show the same fanatical determination for them as he did for the fighting in other theaters of war, especially in the East.

Perhaps Hitler's psychological idiosyncrasies also played a role here, in addition to the strategic aspect of establishing a center of gravity on the Russian front. He had an inner aversion to large-scale colonial initiatives and military operations in overseas territories. When, after much hesitation, he finally agreed to send a German Africa Corps to Libya in 1941, it was perhaps less out of military considerations than out of consideration for the prestige of the fascist regime.

Rommel's surprising successes then gave Hitler cause for justifiable pride and welcome occasions for propaganda; however, he was not prepared to make the concessions to France that would have secured Rommel's supply route via Bizerta and the duration of his

successes. Under these circumstances, there was neither a blockade of the Suez Canal by land nor an effective air and sea blockade, which would only have been possible from Cyprus and Malta. Hitler showed the same indecision on the question of eliminating Gibraltar. After the failure of the negotiations with Madrid, this goal could only be achieved in cooperation with Vichy. But even Weygand's dismissal from high command in North Africa could not persuade Hitler to entertain the idea of such cooperation. Thus the British remained in possession of the decisive key positions in the Mediterranean, and when the Allied offensive against the southern front of the Axis began, it found open doors everywhere.

This passivity on Hitler's part was all the more incomprehensible as even the military layman had to recognize that, since the Western campaign of summer 1940, Anglo-Saxon warfare in both the Middle East and Africa was aimed at dominating the Mediterranean front and was pursuing this goal with admirable consistency. After the occupation of French Equatorial Africa by British-Gaullist forces in the fall of 1940, the British had gained control of Abyssinia, Somaliland and Syria in the summer of 1941. At the beginning of the following year, Djibouti had to cease its heroic resistance. On May 2, 1942, the British air force and fleet bombed Diego-Suarez under the pretext that Japanese submarines were in the harbour area there. An associate of General de Gaulle, Jacques Soustelle, wrote in his book "De Londres à Alger" that de Gaulle had personally urged Churchill in June 1942 to carry out further operations against Madagascar for fear that an agreement might be reached between Vichy and England. On September 10, 1942, the British did indeed land in Madagascar after a bombardment of Majunga troops on the island, but the occupation seems to have been originally planned for the benefit of the Union of South Africa. Churchill sometimes disposed of the French colonial empire no less generously than Roosevelt did of the English, and an eyewitness described to me a very lively encounter between General de Gaulle and Churchill at Pointe-Noire, where the leader of the French resistance movement is said to have succeeded in persuading the English Prime Minister to withdraw his promise to South Africa only after several hours of debate. After an eventful and heroic defensive battle, the defender of Madagascar, General Annet, had to lay down his arms on November 6, 1942. De Gaulle delegated General Legentilhomme to the island, who immediately had the Governor General and the officials who had remained loyal to Vichy imprisoned. On November 8, 1942, the Anglo-American attack on French North Africa began.

Six weeks earlier, on September 25, 1942, I had reported on the imminence of this event as follows on the basis of a message from the Reich government available to the embassy from a reliable foreign source:

"According to news received by the embassy, America and England are planning a large-scale landing operation in Africa between mid-October and mid-November. The Americans intend to land in Dakar, the British in North Africa. The Anglo-Saxons, in cooperation with the Gaullists in Algiers, hope to make the operations of the German and Italian African Corps impossible and to be able to attack Italy and southern France. To this end, after the occupation of North Africa, a landing on Sicily and Sardinia and on the French Mediterranean coast near Toulon and Nice would be undertaken."

This report was not the first and not the only one in which the German Embassy in Paris had drawn the attention of the Imperial Government to the danger of an Anglo-American attack on French North and West Africa and had tried to persuade it to take suitable

military and political countermeasures in good time.

"It must already be clear today," I reported on April 5, 1941, "that English or American attempts to land in North Africa cannot be defeated by the German armistice control commissions, no matter how many personnel they have, but only by French ships and battalions ready to fight."

"Since the Americans," I wrote in a report dated September 21 of the same year, "have gathered their best diplomatic and consular representatives in North Africa in Algiers, where they are making ever more active efforts to draw Weygand and his entourage politically into their camp, it would be desirable to have a German political representation responsible for dealing with political questions in all French colonial and mandate territories in Africa. I propose that this mission be entrusted to Envoy Rahn."

However, my suggestion was no more listened to by the Reich government than my suggestion to Hitler on January 5, 1942, to work towards breaking off diplomatic relations between Vichy and the United States, and than my repeated demand to guarantee France the existence of its overseas possessions in order to increase the moral defense readiness of its fleet and colonial army.

On May 23, 1942, I informed the Reich government of the concerns that the French government had about the dilatory treatment:

"Laval referred to the fierce campaign for the Italian claims on Nice, Corsica and Tunis, which had increased in intensity after his entry into government. Anglo-American propaganda had commented heavily on this Italian propaganda, thereby increasing its impact on French public opinion. Laval feared that this new surge of Italian propaganda could only serve the enemy powers at a time when Anglo-American attacks on the French colonial empire were expected hourly."

A report from the German Embassy in Paris on June 1, 1942 would have deserved no less attention in Berlin and at the Führer's headquarters.

"Concerns about Anglo-Saxon attacks on the French coast and French North and West Africa are growing within the French government and army. During a visit to Vichy by Envoy Rahn, a number of ministers and senior officers, including Admirals Darlan, Auphan and Platon, Generals Dentz and Jannekeyn and Colonial Minister Brevie, raised the issue. Colonial Minister Brevie was of the opinion that such attacks should be expected within a relatively short time. Marshal Petain also stated with great concern that he considered Anglo-American attacks against the French coastal areas and French North and West Africa to be inevitable. Marshal Petain has asked to consider joint precautions in French North and West Africa on the basis of Franco-German general staff discussions, a fact which deserves to be emphasized because it is the first time that the question of the deployment of German forces in French colonial territories has been raised on the French side." "The Secretary of State of the French Ministry of the Navy, Admiral Auphan," I reported on June 9, 1942, "stated today during a visit to the embassy that Anglo-American attacks against the coastal areas of North and West Africa are likely in the near future. He could guarantee that the French land and naval forces would defend themselves bravely against any Anglo-American attack. However, the army and navy were suffering from the oppressive feeling of the political tension that had arisen between Germany and France in recent weeks and feared being abandoned by Germany in the event of an imminent Anglo-American attack. It was out of the same concern that Marshal Petain instructed Laval last week to send the

Reichsregierung his fear that the English might undertake a large-scale attack against the French mother country and colonial empire without prior agreement with Germany on the possibilities of a common military defense."

When Hitler was presented with these two reports, he is said to have exclaimed: "The French apparently want to look at our general staff's cards." He left Betain's request for Franco-German military discussions on the defense of French North and West Africa unanswered, just as he did not acknowledge the offer made by the French head of state to Dieppe to involve French forces in the defense against English attacks against metropolitan France.

On July 23, 1942, I reported to the Reich government: "If the Anglo-Saxons undertake an attack on French North and West Africa, it may be significant that one or two battalions of the politically reliable 'Legion Tricolore' reinforce the French land forces, whose reliability does not necessarily appear to be guaranteed."

However, the Führer's headquarters forbade the expansion of this French volunteer militia, formed from militant elements of the collaboration groups, and prohibited the deployment of its units in any theater of war other than Russia.

Throughout August and September, the German Embassy in Paris made written and verbal representations in Berlin and at the Führer's headquarters to draw attention to the imminent danger of Anglo-Saxon landings in North and West Africa and to ensure that the political climate necessary for a loyal French defense of these territories was not jeopardized by exaggerated demands in occupied France and measures such as those taken by Gauleiter Sauckel.

While I had predicted the date of the Anglo-American attack in Africa to within a week in the aforementioned report of September 29, 1942, a report from the German Embassy in Paris on October 3, 1942, pointed in particular to the uncertain internal political situation in the North and West African colonial territories: "In French circles, the possibility of an American operation against Dakar or Casablanca, as well as against the French Mediterranean coast, is very much on the agenda. Although there is no lack of voices saying that these attacks will be resisted, the prevailing opinion is that the Americans will meet with no resistance, but on the contrary will find support from the military and the administration. The Americans, who are popular, should therefore be sent ahead, and not the English, against whom there is great agitation."

All these reports, warnings and predictions went unheeded in Berlin and at the Führer headquarters, and neither military nor political precautions were taken by the Reich government against the Anglo-Saxon invasion of French North and West Africa. Hitler - and those around him who were convinced of his infallibility - took the stand point that an Anglo-Saxon attack on the French colonial gchictc in North and West Africa would only be undertaken, if at all, against Dakar and only in the spring of 1943. The British and Americans lacked the necessary tonnage for a large-scale landing, and the equinoctial storms would make such maneuvers impossible in the autumn anyway.

The Anglo-American convoy that reached North African coastal waters on the night of November 7-8 was the largest ever to sail the world's oceans, and the landing operations were not in the least hampered by the swell.

The strategic objectives of the Anglo-Saxon attack were the occupation of Casablanca and Algiers. While the French land and air forces took little part in the defensive battles, the French fleet and marines put up fierce resistance both in Casablanca and in the port of

Algiers, Oran. In Casablanca, the French navy suffered 475 dead and 528 wounded, in Oran 165 dead and 18 wounded, and in Algiers 11 dead and 7 wounded. It lost the cruiser *Primangnet*, the destroyer *Epervier*, the torpedo boats *Boulonnais*, *Brestois*, *Fougueux*, *Frondeur*, *Tornade*, *Tramontane*, *Typhon*, the submarines *Acteon*, *Sidi-Ferruck*, *Conquerant*, *Tonnant*, *Sybille*, *Argonaute*, *Amphitrite*, *Psyche*, *Oreade*, *Meduse*, *Diane*, *Ariane*, *Ellas*, *Ceres*; the patrol boats *Ajaccienne*, *Bônoise*, *Toulonnaise*, *Victoria*; the transport ships *Drôme*, *Chene*, *Pigeon*, *Tourterelle* and the *Aviso Surprise*, while the torpedo destroyers *Malin* and *Albatros* and the torpedo boats *Alcyon*, *Tempete* and *Simoun* were damaged.

The indecisive and wait-and-see attitude of the colonial army was due not only to the pro-American attitude that had always been widespread among its officer corps, but also to the capture of its commander-in-chief, General Juin, who was arrested by members of the resistance movement at his staff headquarters in Algiers in the early hours of November 8. In support of the Anglo-American landing, a long-prepared Gaullist uprising had broken out in the North African capital at the same time as it began, the first aim of which was to take control of the leading officers and senior officials who were considered loyal to Vichy. The insurrectionary movement was led by General Mast, who had been released from German captivity and was later to make a name for himself in the state scandal surrounding Indochina. However, General Juin quickly regained control of the situation with the support of Admiral Darlan, who was in Algiers, and took General Mast prisoner.

There are so many differing interpretations and statements about Admiral Darlan's presence in Algiers at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, about the role he played in it and the end he met as a result of it, that it is still difficult to form a clear opinion about it today.

He would not have contradicted himself if he had deliberately sided with the Allies in November 1942,

In his opinion, there were two ways for France to regain its position as a great power in the concert of European nations and to secure a strong position in the peace negotiations: to continue fighting on the side of England or to conclude a military alliance with Germany. His aversion to England and his belief in a German victory had led him to choose the second option in the spring of 1942. However, the Reich government had rejected his repeated offers of alliance, and since the end of summer 1942 Germany's prospects of victory had become much slimmer than those of the Allies. However, its military situation, which had become much more difficult, had not led the Reich government to make greater political concessions, but to toughen its stance towards France; there was less prospect than ever of winning Hitler over to a solution satisfactory to France for the issues pending between the two countries. Admiral Darlan could therefore just as easily have made an internal change of front out of personal disappointment and bitterness as out of a sense of national responsibility and considerations of political expediency. Nevertheless, many facts suggest that Admiral Darlan did not arrive in North Africa on the eve of the invasion with the preconceived intention of joining the Allied camp. He was called from Vichy by a telegram to the sickbed of his son, who was suffering from spinal polio and who was in fact experiencing one of the particularly dangerous crises of this disease in adults. By all indications, Darlan's presence in Algiers on the day of the Allied landing surprised the Anglo-Americans no less than the Anglo-Saxon invasion had surprised Darlan. Even temporarily threatened in his residence by General Mast's partisans, the admiral had

personally ordered his arrest, as well as that of several other officers who had rebelled. Given Darlan's attachment to his navy, not only outwardly as naval commander but also inwardly, he would certainly not have failed to order the squadron in Toulon to sail on November 8 and the naval units and marines in Casablanca and Oran to cease hostilities if he had really been privy to the conspiracy and the plan for the Anglo-American landing.

In my opinion, Darlan was the victim of an unexpected situation and an ingenious political move by the Consul General of the United States in Algiers, Murphy. The American diplomat, in whose hands all the political threads had already converged under Weygand, had become aware in time of the general unpopularity of General de Gaulle and General Giraud, who, incidentally, had arrived late on the North African stage. Rather than sticking to the unpopular elements hostile to Petain, Murphy therefore turned to the officers and officials loyal to Petain and, without demanding that they break with Vichy, suggested to Darlan and General Juin that armistice negotiations be opened with the American army.

The offer had to tempt Darlan. The military situation had become hopeless, the American tanks stood in front of his residence, until his personal need for prestige had to be flattered that the United States was prepared to recognize him as the highest authority in French North Africa. If he refused, Giraud or de Gaulle would come to power. One or the other would not be content with an armistice and the neutralization of North Africa, but would immediately deploy all their forces to fight the Axis powers, regardless of the dangers this would bring upon metropolitan France and the French prisoners of war in Germany. An armistice and Darlan's proconsulate in North Africa, however, allowed a wait-and-see attitude; if, contrary to expectations and despite Rommel's current precarious situation, the Wehrmacht succeeded in launching an effective counterattack against the Anglo-Americans from Libya and Tunis, the bridges with the Reich were not finally broken.

On the morning of 10 November, Darlan sent the American armistice proposal to Vichy, which he himself, General Juin, General Koeltz and the prefect of the port area of Algiers, Admiral Moreau, supported. "We can," Darlan added to his message, "only leave the decision to the marshal and assure him that his order will be carried out." That same morning, Petain replied: "I have ordered the defense of North Africa. I uphold this order." Admiral Darlan then handed himself in as a prisoner of war on the afternoon of 10. In his place, Marshal Petain appointed the resident of Morocco, General Nogues, as plenipotentiary of the French government in North Africa.

In the attitude of Admiral Darlan and his successor, General Nogues, a sharp distinction must be made between the period before and after NOVEMBER 11. November. In the early hours of November 11, Germany and Italy moved to occupy the French southern zone and Corsica. Marshal Petain protested via the Vichy radio station against this measure, which he interpreted as a breach of the armistice agreements of June 1940. From that moment on, Darlan and Nogues took the view that the French head of state should be considered a prisoner and officially went over to the Allied camp. General Nogues concluded the armistice with the American General Patton in Fedallah in Morocco on November 12, 1942. He did not obtain Marshal Petain's permission beforehand, but nevertheless continued to recognize him as head of state. He asked Petain to reinstate Darlan in his functions and to cover the admiral as well as himself, as this was the only way to guarantee authority over the officers and troops of the French land and naval forces who had remained loyal to the marshal.

After the armistice of Fedallah, small groups of colonial arnice in the Atlas Mountains and isolated aircraft in the interior of Morocco

continued the fight against the Anglo-Americans for some time until their resistance also died out.

French West Africa joined the Allied cause on November 16 at the instigation of the former aviation minister Bergeret. It was probably also due to the political wisdom of the Americans that General Boisson, who had defended Dakar against the British-Gaullist attack in September 1940, was not removed from his post as governor of this colony.

All these Anglo-American operations took place without any intervention by German or Italian air or naval forces. Only in Tunis was there a military counter-action by the Axis powers. At a meeting on the evening of November 8, the French Council of Ministers had already decided by a majority to call on the help of the German air force to defend North Africa. This plan for Morocco and Algeria had already been overtaken by events before it came up for negotiation; in Tunis it came to fruition, and from 11 November the first aircraft of Field Marshal Kesselring's air fleet landed at El-Aouina airfield. Even before the arrival of small units of light troops brought over by air, the presence of a few German planes was enough to give the officers and officials loyal to Vichy a foothold against the elements inclined to revolt. Had Germany taken timely precautions against the Anglo-American invasion, would modest German forces not have sufficed to support the supporters of the Vichy government throughout French North Africa?

At the same time as the first German troops, Envoy Rahn arrived in Tunis with a small team from the Embassy in Paris to represent the Foreign Office to the German military commander, General von Arnim, and to the French resident of the protectorate, Admiral Esteva. General Barre's division, garrisoned in Tunis, had withdrawn to the Algerian border and placed itself under the command of Algiers. An associate of the envoy Rahn, who had already accompanied him to Syria, learned that General Barre's staff included officers who had distinguished themselves in the Levant Army against the British in June 1941. He made his way through the lines to ask those who had now joined the uprising why they had changed front. "Back then," he was told, "we still had illusions. But you Germans destroyed them yourselves."

This statement characterized the conflicts of conscience into which the confused political situation had brought the French officers and officials in North Africa. Of course, there was no lack of voices claiming that Marshal Pétain himself was in secret agreement with Algiers; he had Darlan radio in secret on the morning of November 11, after the German troops had crossed the demarcation line, that he approved of the cessation of hostilities against the Anglo-Saxons and the resumption of the fight against the Axis powers and that he entrusted the admiral with the fate of the French colonial empire.

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There is no doubt that Pétain sometimes believed he could protect France's national interest by playing a double game between Germany and the Allies; the octogenarian also had moments of great mental fatigue, in addition to hours of astonishing mental freshness, when he could be coaxed into making statements and even signing documents that did not always coincide with his convictions. However, the above-mentioned version of the marshal's attitude to the North African question is contradicted by the fact that on December 16, 1942, he officially removed Darlan from all offices and - after the admiral's assassination - also disavowed his successor in the harshest terms on December 28, 1942:

"All the unworthy chiefs who have surrendered French Africa to the Anglo-Americans have claimed and continue to claim that they acted in full agreement and even on my behalf. They dare to declare that they express my inner conviction. I offer them the most formal denial."

The assassination attempt on Admiral Darlan in Algiers on Christmas Day 1942, like all events in North Africa in those months, gave rise to many contradictory hypotheses. The assassin, a young student belonging to the "Action Francaise" named Bonnier de la Chapelle, was sentenced to death and executed; his patrons, allegedly close to the de Gaulle movement, are said to have promised him liberation through high protection.

After Darlan's assassination, General Giraud took over the leadership in North Africa. However, he soon became embroiled in fierce power struggles with General de Gaulle, from which General de Gaulle ultimately emerged as the political victor. General Juin had been given front-line command of the French colonial army; Giraud's military ambitions were no longer satisfied and he finally left the stage out of disappointment.

"How can it be explained," I wrote on July 1, 1943 in a summary report on the apostasy of North Africa, "that the French, who had bravely defended themselves against the Anglo-Saxon invaders in Dakar in 1940, in Syria in 1941 and in Madagascar in the spring of 1942, surrendered almost without a fight in the fall of 1942?"

"First of all, it must be taken into account that from the very beginning and with all the more reason in view of the military situation in Libya since the fall of 1942, only French formations could be considered for the defense of French North Africa, to which German and Italian units could be added as reinforcements if necessary. In this situation, Germany and Italy should have made every effort to strengthen the French defense materially and, if this was not desirable or technically impossible, at least morally.

"Instead, in the summer of 1942 of all times, Italy multiplied its propaganda for the annexation of Savoy, Nice, Corsica and Tunisia, which made even many of those French who had been loyal to the Axis skeptical and drove them into the enemy camp.

"In view of the limited interest that the Supreme German Army Command had shown in the area of French North Africa, and in view of the intensification of Italian territorial claims and the increasing stiffening of Franco-German political relations from the summer of 1942 onwards, it is less surprising that French North Africa fell on 8 November than that it did not happen earlier and on its own initiative. It is less surprising that French North Africa fell on November 8 than that it did not fall earlier and on its own initiative; that it needed the guns and tanks of the Anglo-American army; that a bridgehead could be formed in Tunis and held for several months with French help; and especially that on November 8 even isolated units of the land and air forces and almost the entire fleet took up the fight against the Anglo-Saxon invaders."

It was understandable that, since the beginning of the campaign in the east, the attention of the Reich government and the Führer's chief ejuartier had been focused primarily and above all on the Russian theater of war. Nevertheless, Hitler should have attached greater importance to the Mediterranean and North African theater of war. The blow with which the Allies struck the southern front of the Axis in the fall of 1942 proved no less disastrous for the German war effort than the setbacks it would suffer on the eastern front in the following years.

An extended diplomatic illness

On November 9, 1942, I was summoned to the Führer's headquarters, which was in Munich at the time. I was to be present at a reception given by Hitler to Laval, at which the questions raised by the Anglo-Saxon landing in North Africa were to be discussed. On the journey to Dijon, where I met Laval to continue the journey together, my car was held up by long Wehrmacht transports that were on their way to the demarcation line; on the route from Dijon to Munich, the ground was so foggy that the drivers repeatedly refused to take responsibility for steering the cars and had to drive at a walk for hours even after reaching the German highways.

This slow ride through a fog, in which you couldn't see your hand in front of your eyes, was perfect for meditating on the missed opportunities of German policy towards France. For seven months, the French Prime Minister, who had fallen asleep in his seat next to me, had asked, wrestled and fought for a political discussion with the Reich government. Now Hitler was ready for a meeting with the head of the French government, but even before it opened, there was one word that could no longer be banished: too late. The Greeks worshipped a god of the good moment, Kairos; he loves to be sacrificed to; he is no friend to those who fail to recognize his hour.

Could I count it as a political mistake on Laval's part that he no longer wanted to make use of Germany's offer to go "through thick and thin" with France and did not take the Anglo-Saxon invasion of French North Africa as an opportunity to declare war on Great Britain and the United States of America? Was it not primarily the imperial government itself that was to blame if the French cabinet had become so unpopular that it could no longer conclude an alliance with Germany, even in the unlikely event that it had still wanted such an alliance?

In Munich, where I arrived with Laval almost twelve hours late, the news had just arrived that Darlan had agreed to armistice negotiations in North Africa. Even if the occupation of the French southern zone had not yet been decided between the imperial government and Count Ciano, who was also present in Munich, it was now inevitable. Admiral Darlan was the commander-in-chief of the French Wehrmacht and the constitutionally designated successor to the French head of state; his willingness to surrender French North Africa without a fight must already have been regarded by the Axis powers as a transition to the

Allied camp. The part of the French sphere of influence that still adhered to the armistice of June 1940 was thus reduced to such an extent that Germany and Italy no longer needed to feel bound by the armistice. As a result of the formation of a strong enemy base of operations in French North Africa, attacks on the Mediterranean coast of metropolitan France could now be expected on a daily basis; there was therefore also a military reason for the German war effort to include the French southern zone in its defense system.

Laval had had a brief and meaningless conversation with Hitler on the afternoon of November 10 and, as a result of the tiring previous night's journey, went to rest soon after dinner. Shortly after midnight I received instructions from Ribbentrop to inform the French Prime Minister that German and Italian units had been moving into the previously

unoccupied areas of France since the early hours of November 11.

The decision by Germany and Italy was perhaps not entirely unexpected, but nevertheless very difficult for Laval. He was particularly upset that Italian formations were also taking part in the occupation. He immediately demanded, both in Munich and in Vichy, where I accompanied him by plane in the afternoon, that the occupation of the southern zone should have a purely operational character and not lead to the same restrictions on the sovereignty of the French government as in the northern zone. The difference in the statute between the new and old occupied territories demanded by Laval was in fact maintained, and the seat of government at Vichy and the naval base at Toulon were even granted unrestricted military sovereignty. The special statute had an immediate practical significance for the numerous escaped French prisoners of war and Alsace-Lorraine residents dissatisfied with the German civil administration who had taken refuge across the demarcation line since the armistice of 1940.

The disarmament of the French armistice army in the newly occupied territories took place without difficulty in the course of the occupation. General de Gaulle, who had presided over the French military tribunal that sentenced General de Gaulle to death in 1940, attempted to organize military resistance near Montpellier; however, he failed to find any followers and was arrested by French gendarmes during his attempt. General Weygand, who had approached Marshal Petain with the same request, was arrested by German police on his way back from Vichy and transferred to the Reich in honorary detention.

Diplomatic relations between the United States and the French government were severed as a result of the American attack on French North Africa, just as the British attack on Mers-el-Kehir in July 1940 had led to the severing of diplomatic relations between Vichy and London.

On 11 November 1942 I was summoned to Berlin by Ribbentrop; the instruction had already indicated that I would not return to Paris immediately. I would return. When the incident in Toulon, which was caused by false Italian information and led to the self-sinking of the French naval squadron there, took place, I had already been in the imperial capital for several days.

Shortly before Christmas I was once again called to a meeting with Laval and Ciano at the Führer's headquarters; following this meeting the Reich Foreign Minister informed me that I would not be sent back to my post in Paris for the time being.

It is not unusual for a government to temporarily remove a head of mission from his post in order to express a more or less serious disgruntlement to the foreign government. Although I was not officially accredited because of the state of war still prevailing between France and Germany, the Reich government could have resorted to this means to express its dissatisfaction with Vichy over the events in North Africa. My situation, however, was one of characterized personal disgrace. For almost a year I did not get to see Hitler and Ribbentrop, and the only matter that the Foreign Office dealt with during this entire period was a preliminary discussion on the formation of the "Charlemagne Division" as part of the European Waffen-SS.

I was never informed of the reasons for this disgrace, nor was I told how long it would last. However, Hitler's displeasure that I had not had Giraud arrested after the meeting in Moulins in May 1942 obviously played a decisive role. My opposition to various

economic orders by the Reich Marshal and in particular to the forced conscription of French workers by Sauckel had also aroused Hitler's displeasure; on the basis of a complaint by the Gauleiter, he even instructed Ribbentrop to investigate me in this matter. I was regarded in wide circles of the state, the Wehrmacht and the party as too "francophile"; perhaps I had sometimes held too independent views on German policy towards France during my stays at the Führer's headquarters. "How dare you," the Reich Foreign Minister once reproached me after a lecture to Hitler, "you are not allowed to speak to a head of state like that." The main reason for my disgrace was probably the fact that the events in North Africa had proved the Reich government's wait-and-see attitude wrong, but the warnings of the German embassy in Paris against a dilatory approach to the French question right.

To the outside world, my absence from my post was passed off as a vacation. I took my loyalty to the Reich government so far that I did not leave it at "diplomatic illness". After suffering from pneumonia on both sides of my lungs, I developed quite severe heart problems which necessitated several months of convalescence in Upper Bavaria and the Black Forest.

During this time I only received direct news of events in foreign policy through visits from old colleagues and friends from my embassy staff in Paris. Through the envoy Rahn, I learned of the heroic defensive battles in the bridgehead of Tunis; after the evacuation of Libya, Rommel's German-Italian African army was also involved in them, and the diplomatic action of the representative of the Foreign Office had been able to secure stronger-than-expected French support and backing for the military operations to defend the bridgehead. Envoy Schleier, who represented me at the embassy during my absence from Paris, informed me of the many new difficulties that had arisen for Franco-German relations as a result of the occupation of the whole of France, and of the fierce disputes that the German authorities in Paris and the French government had entered into with Gauleiter Sauckel over the increasingly extensive programs for the forced conscription of French workers. Until he was recalled from Paris in the summer of 1943, the head of the embassy's political department, Gesandtschaftsrat Dr. Achenbach, made me aware of the major domestic political concerns of Prime Minister Laval, who was increasingly caught in the crossfire of anti-German government circles and the leaders of the collaborationist groups, who tended towards the other extreme.

In mid-June 1943 - the third anniversary of France's surrender after the Western campaign - I began writing a memorandum on "Franco-German relations since the armistice and their repercussions on the development of the military situation in the Mediterranean and North Africa".

This memorandum, from which I have already quoted several times in this book, contained a compilation of excerpts from reports by the German Embassy in Paris with a few explanatory interludes and retrospective comments. As a "defense" of the political line pursued by the embassy and - if you like - a "bill of indictment" against the Reich government's policy towards France, the memorandum, which was completed on July 1, 1943, was of course not entirely free of bias, both in the selection of the embassy's reports and in its commentary. Some of the points dealt with and substantiated in detail in it related too much to specific accusations made against me in Berlin and at the Führer's headquarters at the time to be of interest in the general context of the Franco-German

question. Nevertheless, the memorandum may perhaps be given brief attention, if only because of the time at which it was written and the persons to whom it was addressed.

As I later used to express the opinion that the "policy of collaboration" demanded unilateral concessions from Germany, my Memorandum emphasized the great military and political support that Vichy had actually given and, to an even greater extent, offered to the German war effort within the framework of this policy. As far as the economic I recalled that in April 1941 France had taken on extensive German orders for the completion of warships, the construction of merchant ships and the production of ammunition for large-caliber guns. In addition also those of:

- 5000 airplanes
- 1000 000 anti-aircraft shells
- 1000,000 projectiles for tanks and anti-tank guns
- 6000 tons of gunpowder per month
- 5,000 transmitters and receivers for the navy and
- 13,000 trucks.

One year later, in April 1942, German armaments contracts worth a total of 4.5 billion marks had already been awarded to French companies in both occupied and unoccupied territories.

My memorandum also recalled that at the same time France had already voluntarily surrendered to Germany the spoils of war taken by the Wehrmacht in the course of the Western campaign and its obligations under the Armistice Agreement - and to a large extent from holdings in unoccupied territory and the colonial empire - among other things:

- 5,000,000 tons of iron and steel
- 2 2 5 000 tons of copper
- 3 40,000 tons of bauxite
- 2 70 000 tons of phosphates
- 170000 tons of wool
- 9 5 0 000 tons of leather
- 200,000 tons of car tires
- 16200 tons of rubber
- 229,000 tons of meat
- 610000 tons of grain
- 8500 tons of butter and edible fats
- 41480** tons of vegetable oils
- 17460 tons of cocoa
- 7 5 5 000 tons of oats
- 8 2 6 000 tons of straw
- 610000 tons of hay
- 2 8 00 000** tons of wine
- 3,000 locomotives
- 15 0 000 railroad cars
- 16484 Machine tools

8,000 motors and
108909 Motor vehicles.

If France had not wanted to provide anything beyond the services imposed on it in the armistice treaty, the German occupying power - as my evidence showed - would have been faced with an insoluble task; even if force had been used, it would not have been able to guarantee a small fraction of the supplies that the voluntary cooperation of the French government had made possible. I also argued that the French government's agreement to employ French prisoners of war in armaments factories in Germany was a contribution to the German war effort that could not be overestimated.

It was the tendency of my memorandum that I strongly emphasized the French achievements within the framework of the "policy of cooperation", but emphasized the German counter-performances and the Embassy's proposals for German counter-performances as little as possible.

In economic terms, the German reciprocal payments had of course fallen far short of the French concessions, if only because of the circumstances of the war, and towards the end of the German occupation the balance in Franco-German clearing was to rise to 8 billion Reichsmarks. By this time, however, Germany had supplied France with goods worth a total of almost 3 billion marks in trade, primarily coal and industrial products, 5,000,000 tons of mineral oil, over 10,000 tons of sugar and large quantities of seed potatoes. It should also be borne in mind that the transfer of German orders to France was in the interests of French industry itself, which without these orders would have been exposed to economic ruin and enormous unemployment. In the same context, it is worth mentioning that the French franc had almost maintained its peacetime exchange rate during the occupation despite the high occupation costs on the stock exchanges of the neutral countries and had not yet fallen by 10% against the American dollar and the pound sterling in August 1944. The sharp fall in the value of the French currency only began under the government that succeeded Vichy.

The German occupation did not only have negative aspects in the food sector either. The share of French agricultural production required by Germany was undoubtedly very large, but the German military administration compensated for the shortfall - with the political and propagandistic support of the embassy - by encouraging and promoting French administrative measures aimed at increasing the area under cultivation. For a century, an area of land the size of the Kingdom of Belgium had lain fallow in France; during the German occupation, an area of this fallow land was plowed again, the size of which corresponded geographically to Alsace-Lorraine. The annual average of German withdrawals from French agricultural production - including requisitions for the occupation troops - only exceeded the 20% limit for fat and meat, and in the 262 most sectors was considerably lower. The level of French bread rations during the last years of German occupation was not reached again until four years after the end of the Vichy regime, at the beginning of fall 1948.

The great importance that French industrial and agricultural production had gained for the German war economy also indirectly benefited the French prisoners of war to a very large extent, just as the treatment of the issue of French prisoners of war must also be regarded in general as the most significant German quid pro quo for the French concessions as part of the collaboration policy. Of the 2.2 million French soldiers who had fallen into German hands during the Western campaign, only 1.15 million were still prisoners of war in the spring of 1942. After the extensive liberations from the frontline

camps, which the Paris embassy had already achieved shortly after the armistice in direct agreement with the German military authorities in France, I succeeded in November 1940, during an oral presentation, in obtaining Hitler's agreement to the release of the 3,5,000 French military internees in Switzerland who had escaped to this neutral territory during the French collapse. With the increasing importance of French production for the German war economy, many more French prisoners of war were freed in the course of 1941, despite the shortage of labor in the Reich, as their employment in their home country promised to be of greater benefit. In addition to the members of such occupational groups, including 50,000 metalworkers and miners and 50,000 managers of medium-sized agricultural enterprises, many tens of thousands of French prisoners of war were also released for purely political, social and humanitarian reasons, such as the fathers and eldest brothers of large families and - as I reminded Hitler when presenting the motion - all former participants in the Great War.

The French prisoners of war who remained behind in Germany were given preferential treatment over all other prisoners of war due to the strong personal activity of their delegate, Ambassador Scapini, as well as thanks to the understanding concessions of the head of the General Wehrmacht Office, Lieutenant General Reinecke; they received numerous benefits to which the Geneva Convention would not have obliged them. The French prisoners of war were allowed to go out on Sundays in the cities without a guard, were admitted to public concerts and film screenings and could visit close relatives in other camps or be transferred to other camps on request. A university was set up in the aspirant camp near Königsberg, where German university professors gave lectures alongside French officers; it was even possible to take exams.

In France itself, scientific and cultural life continued to flourish - not least as a result of the protection and support it received from the German Institute in Paris and its branches in the university towns of the province - continued almost uninterrupted during the four years of occupation, international statistics show that France was the only country at war or affected by the war in which the universities and scientific institutes were able to maintain their operations almost without interruption throughout the war.

German diplomatic and military services took over the mediation of the courier to the French cultural institutes in Greece and the Baltic countries; in the middle of the war, French artists were granted permission to travel abroad, to mention only the guest performances of Louis Jouvet and the "Athenae" in Switzerland and Spain, the concerts of the conductor Charles Münch in Switzerland, Spain and Portugal, as well as the participation of important ensembles of French ballets, actors and musicians in the International Festival Weeks in Zurich.

Censorship of literary publications and plays was as generous as circumstances allowed. Not a single French journalist or writer was harassed for their anti-German stance in the pre-war period. The works of the French government's Secretary of State for Propaganda in September 1939, Jean Giraudoux, a notorious German-hater like Paul Claudel or an outspoken ideological opponent like Jean Paul Sartre were not only printed but also performed in Paris during the occupation.

Despite the general shortage, French publishers received significant allocations of paper; the annual average of their scientific, literary and artistic publications during the German occupation was no lower than during the years of peace. In 1943, the French

publishing industry - in the midst of the war - was the world leader with 9348 publications, ahead of the United States with 8320, England with 6705 and Switzerland with 3325.

The reader who remembers the aforementioned directives of the Reich Ministry of Propaganda on the "dismantling of French cultural creation" of November 1940 will have to admit that these directives were not followed very strictly.

However, the area in which the greatest change was to take place during the occupation was that of territorial issues.

In the days of the armistice, leading figures in the Third Reich, including Hitler himself, were still thinking about the far-reaching dismemberment of France. It was planned to incorporate the northern departments into a future Blandem. State independence was planned for Brittany. Lorraine, which had been annexed to the empire, was to extend far beyond the 1871 border, and Alsace, which was to be reunited with Germany, was to be preceded by Burgundy.

After the armistice, the administrative separation of the departments of Nord and Pas de Calais from the rest of occupied France was agreed with

The reasons given for the creation of the exclusion zone in eastern France were administrative. However, the so-called "north-east line" caused by their special action coincided too closely with the border of the empire before the Thirty Years' War not to suggest that Germany intended to revise the Treaty of Versailles as well as the Peace of Westphalia. The fact that the large numbers of people evacuated from the northern departments and the areas of the exclusion zone during the Western Campaign were forbidden to return for months after the armistice and that an organization of the Reichsnährstand took over several hundred estates in the exclusion zone had to be interpreted as an indication of a later separation of these areas from France.

From the fall of 1940, however, and especially since Montoire, a slow change in the Reich government's views on these issues could be observed, which continued beyond December 13. The population of the Nord and Pas de Calais departments and the exclusion zone were gradually able to return to their homes without restrictions. The goods that had been taken under German control were returned to their French owners in the spring of 1942, and there were no longer any difficulties in the way of normal official communications between the French government and the officials of the northern departments under the control of the military commander in Brussels. From the summer of 1942 onwards, there were practically no administrative differences between these territories and the rest of occupied France.

The tragedy, however, was that the French government was never officially informed of the withdrawal of the special provisions for eastern and northern France issued after the Western campaign. The French government was therefore unable to present the restoration of administrative unity with these territories as a political success in the eyes of public opinion in its own country, nor could it see this as a definitive guarantee that the Reich would renounce these territories.

It was no less regrettable that Hitler was never prepared to renew the declaration made in Montoire on the preservation of the French colonial empire, although he was still inclined to do so in principle.

Even at the end of the summer of 1942, when the German prospects of victory were already barely equal to those of the Allies, such a declaration could still have had a great effect both in the French government and in French North Africa and could have prevented wavering elements from going over to the Allied camp.

Berlin and Rome, however, were struck with blindness. Could it be expected that the French colonial army in North Africa would fight against the Anglo-Americans, whose victory guaranteed France possession of Tunis and Algeria, and that it would sacrifice blood and lives in favor of the Axis powers, whose victory cast doubt on whether Tunis and Algeria belonged to France?

In my opinion, it would have been in the interests of all of them if Germany, Italy and France had reached an understanding on these issues in good time and if the three major Western powers on the continent had been prepared to cooperate to a large extent.

"Only history" - I concluded my memorandum of July 1. July 1943 - "will one day be able to judge whether it was right to pass up the opportunity for such cooperation on a large scale, and whether the Germans, the French and the Italians, who have sabotaged the policy of cooperation since Montoire, have thereby benefited or harmed their fatherland."

A few days later, Mussolini was overthrown in Rome, and shortly afterwards Italy went over to the Allied camp. The greatest obstacle that had stood in the way of Franco-German understanding throughout the years was thus removed; but if Franco-German cooperation could have changed the war situation in the fall of 1942, by the fall of 1943 the foundations had been removed by the development of the war situation.

One afternoon in mid-November 1943, during a stay in Berlin, I was suddenly surprised by an abundance of telephone invitations to tea receptions, lunches and dinners for that day and the following day. The telephone calls continued for several hours; they were all the more puzzling to me as the invitations came from personalities and circles with whom I had not been in contact since my "disgrace". The next day the mystery was cleared up. I learned that Hitler wanted to entrust me with a new mission in Paris. I received instructions from Ribbentrop to go immediately to the Führer's headquarters.

Hitler did not receive me with the same self-assurance that I was used to from previous receptions. He had obviously intended to "set me straight" and admonish me for the "toughness" that a diplomatic mission required at such a serious stage of the war. However, after lengthy remarks on the dangers of "emotional politics", which he seemed to suspect in my view of the Franco-German question, he expressed a self-criticism that was unusual coming from him: "In politics, it is always dangerous to follow your feelings. I also followed my feelings towards Italy and made a big mistake."

Ribbentrop informed me that I would only be sent to Paris for a limited period of time and would then be appointed to a post outside France.

My new mission in Paris

A French government crisis that had been latent since the summer of 1943 had broken out openly at the beginning of November and at the same time led to a serious conflict between the French head of state and the German occupying power.

In the Constitutional Act of July 10, 1940, Marshal Petain had undertaken to convene the National Assembly at a not-too-distant date to present it with the draft of a new constitution; the drafting of this new constitution had even been the express reason for his mandate.

In Vichy, a special commission of the "Conseil National" worked on the new draft constitution on behalf of Marshal Petain until the fall of 1941. At that time, it provided for two chambers. The first was to comprise two hundred members personally appointed for

life by the head of state. The second chamber was to be made up of three hundred deputies, half of whom were to be elected by the head of state and the other half by provincial and municipal councils. In accordance with the Vichy motto "Fatherland, work, family", former front-line fighters, leaders of the professions and fathers of large families were to be given preferential voting rights in these elections. The separation of the powers of the head of state and the head of government, as implemented when the second cabinet was formed, was not yet envisaged at this stage of constitutional planning. The constitution provided for Admiral Darlan to be confirmed as Marshal Petain's successor; in future, the respective head of state and government would then designate three personalities he deemed suitable for his succession, from which the chamber of three hundred, the chamber of two hundred and five hundred delegates of the provincial assemblies would then have to make the final selection when the post became vacant.

This draft constitution was not the only one to find its way into Marshal Petain's desk drawer; over the next two years, a good dozen of them are said to have accumulated and - despite major differences in the democratic concessions - agreed on the personal union of head of state and head of government and the absolute primacy of the executive over the consultative.

On November 13, 1943, Marshal Petain suddenly opened his desk drawer and decided to convene the National Assembly to discuss and decide on the draft constitution. He had already recorded the speech he had planned to deliver to announce this decision when their dissemination was prevented at the last minute by the German radio censorship that had been established in the French state broadcasters since the occupation of the southern zone. The Reich government saw the planned convening of the National Assembly as an attempt, inspired by the Anglo-Saxon democracies, to drag Vichy over to the Allied camp; the political unrest that the convening of the chambers was bound to bring with it also seemed incompatible with the military interests of the German occupying power. As a result of this attitude on the part of the Imperial Government, Marshal Petain declared himself "prevented from exercising his functions as Head of State." He expressed this view by staying away from the flag parade held every Sunday in Vichy.

At the same time, Prime Minister Laval's situation had come to a critical head. As early as the beginning of October 1943, the collaborationist groups had demanded that their leaders be given a decisive share in power if France was not to be ruled by a German Gauleiter or become a political bridgehead for the Anglo-Saxons in Europe. Laval declared that he could not agree to this demand until the French people and Marshal Petain were certain that Hitler really wanted a reorganization of Europe with French cooperation. Without this clarification of Franco-German relations, the entry of leaders of collaborationist groups into the cabinet would lack political logic and would cause the French government to lose its last credit with the administration and the police. A considerable part of the French civil service was indisputably opposed to collaboration and its representatives; if the governmental and administrative apparatus in France was still functioning, it was only because his cabinet, together with Petain, embodied the French governmental tradition.

If Laval did not yet consider the time for the entry of leaders of the collaborationist groups to be ripe, or - more correctly - no longer ripe, he was less reluctant to have his cabinet supported by parliamentarians from the pre-war period. He had already pointed out to Marshal Petain before November 13 that a decision with such far-reaching

consequences as the convening of the National Assembly had to be brought to the attention of the occupying power before it was announced. However, he was not opposed to the plan itself. However, the authors of this plan, old enemies of Laval, had vowed to overthrow the Prime Minister at the same time, and the prepared government list without Laval's name was already circulating in insider circles.

Thus, from November 13, 1943, there were sufficient conditions in Vichy for a new "December 13, 1940" or, to take an event closer in time and closer to the Reich government, for a second "Badoglio case". My suddenly regained grace and renewed posting to Paris were probably explained not least by this escalation of the Vichy government crisis.

Ribbentrop gave me instructions on how to solve this problem, which were not easy to carry out, especially as they were almost mutually exclusive. First of all, I was to try to ensure that Marshal Petain, despite the German objection to the convening of the National Assembly, no longer considered himself "prevented from exercising his function". At the same time, I was to consolidate President Laval's position, but also to ensure that all members of the government and senior civil servants who were not prepared to cooperate closely with Germany were dismissed and replaced by collaborationist figures. Finally, the Reich government wanted Vichy to undertake to obtain German approval in good time for any future draft legislation.

The Reich Foreign Minister had set out these various points in a letter to the French head of state, which I was to deliver personally to Marshal Petain in Vichy as soon as I arrived in Paris. The fear that the marshal would go over to the Allied camp or be kidnapped by the resistance movement was so great on the German side that military and political reinforcements had been gathered around Vichy. Even Skorzeny, who had already had some practice in liberating foreign statesmen, was among this contingent with a detachment, just as it is said to have happened that firefighters arrived at the scene of the fire before it had broken out.

My aim was to settle the matter amicably. After a few conversations, Marshal Petain declared that he was no longer "prevented from exercising his function as Head of State" - out of "esteem for my person", as he kindly assured me and also emphasized in his letter to Hitler. However, I asked the Marshal to omit this flattering passage in his reply to the Reich government. An agreement was also reached with Vichy on the replacement of members of the government and administrative officials who threatened to jeopardize the security of the German occupying power with ministers and heads of authorities who appeared reliable in this respect. This was facilitated by the fact that, as instructed, I only had to submit a list of the "suspects", but the Reich government deliberately refrained from making any proposals for the replacement of the posts. The State Secretariat for Information and Propaganda was taken over by Philippe Henriot, a member of parliament, who had already attracted attention before the war with his rousing oratory and had made a name for himself as a speaker on Vichy state radio. In the Ministry of the Interior, the General Secretariat for the "Maintenance of Public Peace and Order" was created and - in this case - transferred to the head of the "French Militia" Joseph Darnand, who had joined the "Charlemagne Division" of the Waffen-SS with many of his supporters in 1943, not entirely without German pressure on Laval. The Ministry of Labor ended up in the hands of the chief editor of the Paris "Oeuvre" and head of the "Volks-Marcel Deat, who, however, never took part in cabinet meetings in Vichy. The demand

made in the letter from the Reich Foreign Minister that the French government should in future obtain German approval in good time for drafts amending the law posed no new problem. According to the French constitution, French laws only came into force after their publication in the "Journal Officiel". In order to guarantee their legal effectiveness in the northern zone as well, Vichy had therefore already decided at the beginning of the occupation to submit the issues of the "Journal Officiel" to the German military commander for censorship before they appeared.

Once the French government crisis had been settled amicably, a second order from Ribbentrop caused me a new headache. While still in Berlin, he had instructed me, with the support of the German and French police, to have two thousand French personalities arrested who were suspected of dissident activities and could endanger the security of the German occupying power at the time of the expected Anglo-American invasion. From the end of December 1943 and the beginning of January 1944, the Reich Foreign Minister pressed for the "execution report" on this action in ever sharper form.

Preventive arrests have taken place at all times and under all military and civilian regimes, including in Western democracies. The "Rowlatt Acts" issued by the British government in India in 1919 made it possible to impose imprisonment without a prior public trial. In September 1939, the French government ordered the so-called "internements administratifs" of foreigners and militants of the extreme left who had not been proven to have committed acts against the security of the state, but who were suspected of such acts. After the outbreak of war in East Asia, the United States interned a large proportion of American citizens of Japanese origin for fear that the feeling of racial solidarity would prove stronger than that of citizenship. In the spring of 1945, the British army interned the entire civilian population in some places during the fighting in the Rhineland, not to mention the subsequent mass internment of officials and supporters of the National Socialist Party by all the Allied occupying powers.

I was personally opposed to preventive arrests because they open the door to arbitrariness and denunciation. I also expected them to do more harm than good politically. In agreement with the commander of the German security police in France, I therefore had the "black list" ordered by Ribbentrop reduced from two thousand to fifteen hundred, from fifteen hundred to one hundred and three and - with ever new objections - from one hundred and three to sixty-seven, thirty-six and finally to six people. But even of these six people, four were never arrested; the arrest of the remaining two was not based on suspicion, but

actual acts of resistance against the German occupying power. When Ribbentrop discovered in May 1944 that I had not complied with his order for preventive arrests despite assurances to the contrary, he ordered disciplinary proceedings against me in Berlin. I owe it to the understanding and personal courage of State Secretary von Steengracht, who was in charge of these proceedings, that the Reich Foreign Minister did not have any serious sanctions imposed on me at the time.

On my return to Paris, I was faced with a no less difficult task as a result of another major campaign by Sauckel. I had barely resumed my ambassadorial post when the "Reichskommissar für den Arbeitseinsatz" (Reich Commissioner for Labor Deployment) arrived and drew up a program for the forced recruitment of one million French workers for Germany for the beginning of 1944. All German authorities, from the Commander-in-Chief West to the military commander to the Higher SS and Police Leader, opposed the

Gauleiter's demand in the strongest possible terms; the Reich Minister for Armaments and Munitions, Speer, who had agreed a major program with the French Minister of Production, Bichelonne, for the further transfer of German orders to France, also spoke out against new forced recruitment of French workers to Germany. When I told Gauleiter Sauckel that out of a thousand Frenchmen called up to work in the Reich, perhaps fifty would be at the station at the moment of departure, but that the remaining nine hundred and fifty would not only shoot the Wehrmacht in the back as resisters, but would also be lost as workers in the factories working almost exclusively for German orders, he replied: "I am the Reichskommissar for the deployment of labor; if I have these fifty workers, I have them; to deal with the other nine hundred and fifty is a matter for the German authorities in France." Such a one-sided view of an assignment may honor those entrusted with it and those fulfilling it, but it casts a very dubious light on the leadership of a state in which the conflicting departmental interests at the top were so poorly coordinated.

Since Sauckel could not be dissuaded from his plan despite the opposition he faced in Paris, and since he had once again secured Hitler's express approval at the beginning of January 1944, the only thing left to prevent his plan, which was detrimental to the interests of the Reich, was cunning. It was a matter of playing off a "Führer order" against a "Führer order". The German Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden had just received another instruction from Hitler himself to ban all gatherings of young people fit for military service in camps and pre-military youth organizations of any kind in the strictest possible terms in view of the expected Anglo-American invasion of France. I therefore urged the French government to offer Sauckel the prospect of the requested one million new recruits by calling up three annual classes of young men, on condition that the young people would be trained before being sent away in groups.

after the Reich were initially to be trained in France in French labor camps on French work projects. What had to happen, happened. The German Armistice Commissions, the High Command of the Wehrmacht and the Commander-in-Chief West could not, of course, give their consent to the establishment of such camps on the eve of an invasion. Negotiations on the principle and modalities of this plan dragged on for months until they were finally overtaken by military events in the summer of 1944.

Recruitment on a voluntary basis resulted in several tens of thousands of reports up to the first weeks of the Normandy Battle; by this time, several hundred thousand additional workers could be deployed for the companies with German armaments orders.

During the discussions between the French government and Sauckel, which Laval always conducted personally, I sometimes wondered whether the great negotiating talent of the French Prime Minister could not have been used more profitably in the interests of both countries than in these unfruitful exchanges with a German Gauleiter.

Laval's great dream since 1940 had been to be the new Talleyrand, who would seek compromises during the war to end it quickly and prepare a treaty for the peace negotiations that could, in human terms, ensure a long period of good neighborliness, peace and prosperity for the nations. As a French patriot, he hoped that this would enable his country to avert the consequences of the defeat suffered in the Western campaign of 1940. As a patriotic European - and Laval was one of the first patriotic Europeans - he believed that this would also provide a valuable service to the pacification and security of the entire continent.

However, the "diplomatic potential" that France could have offered in world politics, even as a defeated country and especially through the unusual negotiating skills of its

prime minister, was just as little recognized and exploited by the Reich government as the great moral potential of this country and the military potential of its fleet and colonial army. More than once Laval exclaimed to me and close associates of the German Embassy, half jokingly, half desperately: "Let me do your Führer's foreign policy; he sees the international problems wrongly."

Before America's entry into the war, Laval's dream had been to prevent this entry; after America's entry into the war, he dreamed for a long time of being able to contribute to a compromise peace between the Axis powers and the United States. In this desire, the French Prime Minister met with many circles in Vichy that were otherwise distant from him, as well as with Marshal Petain himself. "We owe England nothing," the French head of state repeatedly said, "but we owe America a great deal; that's where I want to try to pull the lever for the good of France. Oh, if only Germany and America could be brought closer together!"

In January 1944, under the impression of the ever-increasing destruction and devastation caused by the war, a proposal was made in Stockholm to attempt mediation between the Axis powers and the Western Allies via the King of Sweden, the Pope and Marshal Petain, and this proposal immediately fell on favorable ground in Vichy. Accompanied by the Swedish Consul General Nordling, a childhood friend of King Gustaf, Laval came to see me at the embassy to let me in on the plan. I do not know how this proposal for a peaceful mediation was received in London and Washington; I never received an answer or statement from the Imperial Government, to which I immediately reported Laval's demarche.

At the same time, in February 1944, Laval was also planning a mediation operation between Germany and the Soviet Union. When his diplomatic assistant Joseph des Clausais presented him with a written draft of a German-Russian compromise peace, the French Prime Minister made the following revealing statement to his foreign policy confidant: "The drama we are living is to ensure that the German victory does not crush our country and that the German defeat does not leave it at the mercy of Bolshevism." Laval authorized Joseph des Clausais to travel to Stockholm in April 1944 and to inform his Russian interlocutors in that city that although the move was of a private nature, it was done in full agreement with the French Prime Minister. In Moscow they seemed to want to pick up the thread; at the Führer's headquarters, Ambassador Hewel expressed his personal interest in the initiative; it also seems to have received attention from Himmler's entourage. However, as Hitler proved to be completely unapproachable, the French mediation plan had not yet been presented to him when the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Normandy began; after the breakthrough at Avranches, military events rushed forward in such a way that the basis for these plans was finally withdrawn.

While Laval had never lacked initiative as foreign minister, as a domestic politician he was often accused, even by his friends, of showing too little initiative. The conflict that broke out in Vichy on November 13, 1943, was due in no small part to the fact that Petain, as head of government and Minister of the Interior, held Laval responsible for the growing crisis of authority in France.

In German circles, too, there was no lack of critical voices against the French Prime Minister. The head of the economic delegation of the German Armistice Commission, Envoy Hemmen, whom Ribbentrop had appointed as first embassy councillor in place of Envoy Schleier on my return to Paris and to whom he had granted a direct reporting

channel, made the following statement to the Reich Foreign Minister in a secret report on the internal situation in France on February 25, 1944:

"In the unoccupied southern zone, especially in Savoy and the Massif Central, small resistance groups of discontented and disaffected people had gradually formed. They were formed by dubious elements who had escaped from the occupied northern zone; after November 1942, officers and soldiers from the disbanded Armistice Army also joined them. The dissidents of Algiers and the London government supported them with money and weapons. The prefects and especially the Vichy government tacitly tolerated, if not encouraged, these resistance groups.

Laval has been standing idly by for months, for which he gives the flimsiest of reasons. Since his government and his prefects lack a sense of responsibility, they have done nothing to combat this growing internal disorder."

Envoy Hemmen then asked the Reich Foreign Minister to consider whether it would not be appropriate to bring a "government of terror" under men like Doriot to power in France instead of Laval.

It must give pause for thought that an old career Foreign Service official and notorious opponent of National Socialism like Envoy Hemmen recommended the same domestic policy remedy for France as a Gauleiter Bürckel, a Gauleiter Sauckel and other extremists of the National Socialist Party: the introduction of a sharply fascist course. I did not share this view, and the nine months of my new mission, which were interrupted in March and April 1944 by a second "disgrace" and dismissal from Paris, were dominated by the struggle over this question.

Of all the candidates for the dictatorship in France, Jacques Doriot, the leader of the "French People's Party", was undoubtedly the most dynamic personality and also had the strongest following. The son of a blacksmith from Brittany, Jacques Doriot had already become a member of the Comintern and the Central Committee of the French Communist Party at a relatively young age, but broke with Moscow in 1935 and founded his own party, the "Parti Populaire Français". The party probably also attracted support from the middle classes and young intellectuals, but what distinguished it from similar parties founded in France was that it counted workers among its members. If Colonel La Rocque's "Fire Cross Movement" was said to be made up of castle owners and their valets and chauffeurs, Jacques Doriot could not be denied that he also had a not too large but solid base of workers behind him. Jacques Doriot had the strongest following in North Africa, in Marseilles and in Saint-Denis. This industrial city, which has now merged with Paris and still has the old basilica of the French kings within its walls, had elected Jacques Doriot to the Chamber of Deputies before the war after a fierce battle with the Communist opponent; in addition to the seat, it also provided his party with the greeting and battle cry "En avant Saint-Denis".

After the armistice, Jacques Doriot had initially taken a back seat politically, taking sides against Laval after December 13, 1940 with a pamphlet entitled "Je suis un homme du Marechal" and reaffirming his

The "Volksnationale Sammlungsbewegung" ("People's National Rally Movement"), which was formed at the beginning of 1941, was kept away from the attempt to unite all collaborationist groups.

Doriot was not hostile to Laval's re-entry into the government in April 1942, but fell out with the Prime Minister again after the new cabinet was formed, in which not a single member of his party was included. After a lengthy deployment as a lieutenant in the

"French Anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Legion" on the Eastern Front, Jacques Doriot returned to Paris at the end of 1943 to resume his political activities.

From 1943 onwards, Laval increasingly steered the French government towards a "policy of neutrality". At the beginning of 1944, he had instructed the administrative officials of the departments and the police not to take sides with either the Anglo-Saxon or German troops in the event of an Allied landing; the French authorities were to devote their efforts exclusively to helping the civilian population, putting out fires, caring for refugees and bombed-out people and maintaining public peace and order in the rear front area.

Doriot wanted to reactivate the "collaboration policy", form a government of unconditional and unrestricted cooperation with Germany, bring France more into line with the National Socialist and Fascist regimes in the domestic political sphere and call for a fight against England and America in foreign policy. He saw in Laval the old parliamentarian who was in league with the Western democracies at heart - if not through actual intrigue - and who betrayed the cause of the "New Europe" despite soothing rhetoric.

This made the conflict between Doriot and Laval unavoidable and it quickly became the subject of fierce debate in the Parisian press. As I stood in front of the Prime Minister in this conflict, I gained a reputation among Doriot's French and German party supporters as an enemy of National Socialism and a secret supporter of democratic and republican ideas.

In reality, however, neither antipathies nor sympathies of this kind were decisive for my attitude. The internal situation in France had worsened considerably since 1942. Fewer and fewer French people still believed in a German victory, and the country could become a theater of war again from one day to the next. I was therefore only allowed to be guided in my considerations by the one question of whether German interests and the security of the German occupying troops and operational armies in France were better served by the Laval government or by a Doriot government.

Laval's government directives only partially accommodated the German wishes; however - and precisely because of this restraint - they offered a certain guarantee that they would be followed by the authorities in Vichy and the administration in the departments. Doriot's course of reform promised the German occupying power, but precisely for this reason he had to make the disorganization in the French administration unstoppable.

I had not become an opponent of the collaboration policy, but circumstances had changed. From 1940 to 1942, I had advocated the idea of close cooperation between the two countries, including in the military field. During my new mission in Paris from December 1943 onwards, I advocated the French government's policy of neutrality - even when military developments forced the Vichy government to abdicate in August 1944 and I supported Laval's attempt to set up an interim government, which in turn could have guaranteed a "policy of neutrality" to a certain extent.

Occupying power and resistance movement

In "Servitude et grandeur militaires", Alfred de Vigny devotes one of his observations to the strange phenomenon that civilians believe they have the natural right to fire on the troops of the legal power during social unrest and civil wars. On such occasions, the author remarks, they indulge in this activity no differently than in the pleasures of the hunt; those who wear uniforms are anonymous and, if they are killed, have no father, mother, wife or girlfriend to mourn them.

This psychological observation by the officer and writer de Vigny also applies to the French resistance movement against the German occupying power in the Second World War, which was less a national than an ideological war. The relationship was already apparent in the composition of the resistance circles. The traditional patriotic element was much less represented than the partisans of anti-national socialist and anti-fascist doctrines. On the German side, too, ideological tendencies prevailed in the conduct of the war. "Jews, Freemasons and the ideological opponents allied with them", we read in an order from Adolf Hitler to all branches of the Wehrmacht, the party and the state, "are the authors of the present war directed against us"; an order from Reich Marshal Göring drew the conclusion from this statement that "the fight against Jews, Freemasons and the ideological and opposing powers allied with them" was a "priority task of National Socialism during the war".

In France, as in all occupied territories, orders from the Führer's headquarters prompted decrees by the military commander against the organizations of the aforementioned "ideological opponents". Whether it was because large sections of the population actually saw the culprits for the rapid French collapse in those "supranational" circles that provided the new regime with a catchword no less cheap than the "5th column" had provided the previous regime, or whether such measures had been expected as the inevitable consequence of a German occupation, the French population initially accepted these decrees without any notable opposition, especially as the French government had largely incorporated them into its own legislation. The French resistance movement only found noticeable support among broader sections of the population when the Communists took up a clear fighting position against the occupying power at the beginning of the German-Russian war. The communists immediately began to

The aim was to work their tried and tested tripartite groups out of illegality and to put up the front that had been called for at the Moscow Party Congress in 1928 as part of the overall struggle for power: to organize l'artisanentum in the event of war in order to relieve the Red Army. War-important installations and national facilities became targets of acts of sabotage. German soldiers and officers were shot in those areas where the relationship between the population and the occupying forces was particularly good. Centrally controlled agents were deployed to destroy the desired collaboration from below. The activity of the illegal communist organization intensified within a few months. Agents and assassins were smuggled in from abroad, who disappeared again immediately after completing their mission. By the time the winter offensive in the east of 1941 had come to a standstill, the attacks against the troops had already taken on such forms that the army, navy and air force had to report considerable losses of men and material.

The Führer's headquarters, O.K.W. and O.K.H., represented by the then military commander Otto von Stülpnagel, were faced with the question of how to counter this attack by the resistance circles. Even the Hague Land Warfare Convention of 1907 provided for reprisals in such cases. However, the laws of war of the various signatory powers, which were based on the Land Warfare Convention, were not yet adapted to a technical development that used airplanes and parachutes to deploy agents in the occupied country, only to have them return the next night to the safety of their headquarters in London or Algiers. In the past, the perpetrators were residents of the towns and villages where the attacks against the occupying power had taken place. The international wartime customs for punishing acts contrary to international law in occupied territories had been superseded by modern technology and partisan tactics. Of course, the military commander in France had announced the usual bans on the possession of weapons, storage of explosives, etc. and, after the first attacks, bans on going out, curfews, guarding of cable lines by the male population and fines for the villages where attacks had taken place had been imposed. These measures did not seem sufficient to the Führer's headquarters, as the attacks increased. The Führer's headquarters therefore ordered hostage shootings.

The German authorities in Paris expressed the strongest reservations about these measures, as the enemy powers could only have an interest in disturbing the good relations between the occupying power and the population through assassinations and subsequent hostage shootings. In some of the cases that were solved, it had indeed turned out that the assassins were local and foreign elements. However, the Führer's headquarters insisted that the orders given be carried out and the military commander had to obey them. He drew up lists of the prisoners in French prisons, regardless of whether they had been convicted of political or criminal offenses.

were declared hostages for French or German authorities. In a letter to the O.K.H. dated January 15, 1942, General von Stülpnagel once again expressed his grave reservations about the continuation of this type of hostage shooting in very strong terms. He pointed out that, as military commander, he could not take responsibility for this and asked the O.K.H. to dismiss him. The answer to this letter was his retirement.

Under his successor, General Heinrich von Stülpnagel, the Higher SS and Police Leader also took over the punishment of assassinations and acts of sabotage on June 1, 1942 as part of his general task of maintaining peace and order and the security of the troops. He no longer punished assassinations by shooting hostages, but by executing expiators who had either already been sentenced to death for serious acts of resistance or were certain to face this punishment.

Uninformed circles often put the number of executions carried out in reprisal for assassinations of German Wehrmacht personnel in France at 80,000; in reality, the number of hostages shot by the military commander up to June 1, 1942 was 498, while from June 1, 1942 until the evacuation of Paris in 1944, 254 expiators were shot by the Higher SS and Police Leader.

In addition to the professional ambition that the Higher SS and Police Leader put into identifying the real perpetrators, this low number compared to other occupied territories can be explained above all by the fact that he was able to rely to a large extent on the cooperation of the French police to maintain peace and order. While only 2,500 security police and SD men were available for its tasks throughout France, as well as a regiment of

order police for a time, the French police had retained its full peacetime strength of over 10,000 men; in Paris alone it numbered 30,000 officers.

"The German and French police," it says in the agreement reached with the Secretary General of the French police in the summer of 1942, "are aware of the commonality of their task, which consists in maintaining peace and order and in preventing and countering attacks by all means at their disposal, attacks by communists, terrorists, enemy agents, saboteurs and their hidden Jewish, Bolshevik and Anglo-American backers against the security of the Wehrmacht and the interests of the German Reich as well as against the peaceful development of the French people."

The cooperation between the German and French police was just beginning to bear fruit - in Paris an organization involved in numerous assassinations and acts of sabotage was identified, and in the southern zone a network of enemy secret transmitters was uncovered - when two events gave the French resistance movement new impetus:

the transfer of French North Africa to de Gaulle and the simultaneous forced recruitment of French workers by Gauleiter Sauckel. The defection of French North Africa coincided with a general deterioration of the Reich's military situation on all fronts. Many Frenchmen, who had only advocated rapprochement with Germany because they had believed German victory to be inevitable, now switched to the opposing camp and backed the Allied cause. However, a very large proportion of the French who had been called to work for the Reich left their homes; they lost the right to food ration cards and were therefore sooner or later driven from passive to active illegality.

From the winter of 1942/43 onwards, the French resistance movement in the north and in the newly occupied southern zone was a force that could no longer be underestimated. However, its danger was diminished by its extensive internal fragmentation. In addition to the opposition between the "foreign Resistance", which was dependent on the Allied General Staff, and the "domestic Resistance", which resisted paternalism, there were sharp contrasts between the nationalist organizations, whose sole aim was the liberation of France from the enemy occupying power, and the left-wing revolutionary organizations, which wanted to combine the liberation from the external enemy with the internal seizure of power. The Communists were also able to penetrate the nationalist organizations and occupy key positions there.

As different as the collaborationist groups and the groups of the resistance movement may have been in terms of their objectives, they were similar in terms of the fragmentation of forces and internal disunity, unless the resistance movement can perhaps be given a significant lead here. In addition to several larger groups, there were up to 50 smaller groups operating on their own and some of which had placed themselves under the leadership of criminal elements and Red Spanish gang leaders.

Several leading organizations existed at the same time. The most important of these were the "Organisation Resistante de l'Armée", which was still led for a long time by nationalist circles, close to the Deuxième Bureau and usually referred to as the "Armée Secrète", popularly also as the "Armée Sauckel", from which the "Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur" (F.F.I.), and the "Mouvements Unis de Résistance", which had a strong communist influence from the outset and whose militant formations were subsequently formed by the predominantly class-struggle-oriented "Francs-Tireurs Travailleurs et Partisans" (F.T.P.). The "French Section", controlled by the British Secret Service,

supplied these various groups with weapons, but also maintained its own espionage and sabotage organizations in France.

The actions and counter-actions evoked by these groups were not long in coming. From January to September 1943, 534 assassination attempts were carried out, 281 of them against members of the German Wehrmacht, 79 against French police officers and 174 against French collaborators. In the same period, 3802 acts of sabotage took place, of which 781 were directed against German Wehrmacht facilities, 1242 against French companies and office buildings and 1262 against railroads; the remaining 517 cases of sabotage were arson in 80 cases. These sabotage attacks represented three times the number of the previous year; arrests also increased to the same extent, rising from 1097 in January 1943 to 3759 in September 1943. From April to September 1943, 13,3 weapons and explosives depots, 64 secret camps of former French Hceres- good and 43 parachute drops of weapons and ammunition were uncovered.

From mid-September to mid-October 1943, 32 new weapons caches were discovered, in which 1239 parachute drums containing a total of 40,000 kilograms of weapons and explosives were dug up. In the same short period of time, 193 functionaries of the "Armee Secrete" and 374 functionaries of the "Mouvements Unis de Resistance" were arrested.

By mid-October 1943, 2000 parachute drums with 1600 submachine guns, 550 pistols, 7000 hand grenades, 3800 kilograms of explosives, 3500 incendiary bombs and 26 radios had been uncovered in the "French Section" drops alone.

From November 1943 onwards, assassination attempts, acts of sabotage and weapons drops increased considerably in preparation for the Allied landing expected in spring 1944. There were 20 secret transmitters linked to Moscow, 10 to Algiers and over 80 to London. In some departments of the southern zone, particularly between Toulouse and Limoges and in Haute-Savoie, temporary localized seizures of power by the resistance movements and the blowing up of tunnels, bridges and viaducts took place from spring 1944 onwards.

The German countermeasures intensified to the same extent. As the French prisons were quickly overcrowded due to the large number of arrests, but military security forbade the establishment of internment camps on French soil, the political prisoners were transported to prisons and internment camps in the Reich from the spring of 1942, and increasingly so from the fall of 1943. These deportations were a matter of military necessity. The outrageous treatment meted out to the political prisoners in the German concentration camps in many cases is another matter, however. It must be emphasized, however, that the prisoners were no longer under the jurisdiction of the German military and political authorities in France from the moment they were transported away.

The armed uprising that the French resistance groups had launched in some areas in the winter of 1943/44 could not be put down by the German police forces alone. After the appointment of militia chief Darnand as "General Secretary for the Maintenance of Public Order and Peace", the "French Militia" also took part in fighting the local uprisings. At the same time, the German occupation and operational troops were ordered to take up the fight against the terrorist organizations and resistance groups in their respective sections. The press attaché of the German embassy in Paris, Dr. Wissmann, who had witnessed an action by the French militia against the resistance movement on the "Plateau de Glieres" in Haute Savoie, reported as follows on

March 30, 1944:

"Among the prisoners were members of the International Red Brigade who did not speak French, common law criminals and young people aged 16-18, including the 16-year-old nephew of Colonel Chappuis, who had previously worked in Marshal Petain's cabinet.

According to statements by the French militia leaders deployed in Thorens and the surrounding area, the local population initially received the French police forces with a cool, almost hostile attitude out of fear of the terrorists. This attitude changed completely after the first prisoners were brought in. Owners of remote huts, who had previously suffered greatly under the Red Terror, provided the French militia and police forces with useful information and asked to be allowed to take part in the actions with weapons themselves. The weapons material brought in revealed that they were mainly machine guns and submachine guns of English and Canadian origin, which had been dropped over the plateau.

Among the leaders of the approximately 450-500-strong gang were, in addition to some former officers of the 27th French Alpine Infantry Regiment, Bolshevik leaders of the International Red Brigade, as revealed by the papers of a Red-Spanish gang leader shot dead in battle."

Although the observations made during this action should perhaps not be generalized without further ado, they do provide a valuable insight into the composition of the French resistance movement: Criminals of the common law stood next to the youthful nephew of a colonel from Marshal Petain's cabinet, red class fighters from the Spanish Civil War next to the officers of an elite French regiment.

At the beginning of the invasion of Normandy, an attempt was made to unite all resistance groups in the top organization of the "Forces Frangaises de l'Interieur", to place them under the unified command of General König and to identify them as regular troops by equipping them with uniforms and armbands. On July 15, 1944, London radio announced that the "French Forces of the Interior" now met the requirements of international law.

In a counter-declaration on July 24, 1944, the "Oberbefehlshaber West" announced via press and radio that the members of the resistance groups were still to be regarded as Francs-Tireurs. The reason given for this German statement was the armistice concluded with the French government, which granted all French nationals prohibited fighting against Germany in the service of a power at war with Germany and stipulated that French nationals violating this provision would be treated as francs-tireurs.

The "Oberbefehlshaber West" further justified the German statement by stating that the resistance groups were not waging an open fight against the German army, but were committing thefts, acts of sabotage and murders in small, camouflaged formations, hiding their weapons from intervening German troops and French police forces and going into hiding as peaceful citizens. After the recapture of Tülle, an important center of resistance, the bodies of German soldiers were found with their skulls smashed in and their eyes gouged out. The rebels had driven over German soldiers who were still alive with heavy trucks and disfigured them beyond recognition. On July 18, 1944, the mutilated bodies of eight German soldiers who had fallen into the hands of the gangs were found near Pau.

"The Allied High Command," concluded the German declaration, "should not deceive itself as to the extent of the documents which the High Command of the Wehrmacht has in

its hands concerning the originators, the significance, the organization and the methods of struggle of the insurrectionary movement which did not originate in France.

France has a legal government and its relations with the German occupying forces are regulated by the armistice.

Anyone who organizes or participates in uprisings behind the back of the occupying forces is and remains a franc-tireur.

If the Allied High Command wishes this barbaric form of war, it can have it. But let it take account of the fact that in this case the battle will be fought on both sides with the same means."

Even before the London announcement and the German response, the struggle between the occupying forces and the resistance movement in both camps had taken on the form of a civil war with all its attendant symptoms. Tulle was not the most serious act of bloodshed on the French side, and Oradour was not the only act of bloodshed on the German side. As in the religious wars of earlier times, one began to see in the enemy an embodiment of the satanic principle, in his ruthless treatment a work pleasing to the higher power. Who had started, who had answered?

With the extermination of tens of thousands of Jewish lives in the extermination camps of the East, the National Socialist state leadership brought upon itself a one-sided, criminal and unforgivable bloodguilt, for the Jews deported from France under the pretext of labor deployment were as little guilty of the outbreak of the new world conflagration and the unleashing of the bombing war against the German civilian population as the aristocrats who remained in France in 1789 and were executed by Robespierre in 1792 were guilty of the formation of the enemy coalition and the war against their French fatherland.

However, the original blame for the terrible forms that the conflict between the German occupying power and the French resistance movement took cannot be attributed to Germany. The hatred that was also expressed on the German side towards the end of the occupation was often based on disappointed love. In the all-germcinen, people only know about the atrocities committed by others and ignore or conceal their own. White papers will probably be published one day, after an objective examination of the facts, about what Germans did to the French in this war and what the French did to the Germans during and after this war. It would be good if the two governments would then agree that the French White Paper should only be published in German and in Germany, and the German White Paper only in French and in France. They would then serve not to incite nationalism, but to promote inner reflection and reconciliation between the two nations.

After months of the sniper warfare that had broken out in the ranks of both the French and the German units deployed to fight them, the actions of the "Forces Fran^aaises de ITnterieur" lost their partisan character in the course of military developments and took on the form of open combat in regular troop units.

When a closed front line had formed in the Vosges, the "Oberbefehlshaber West" took this changed situation into account and issued the following order on September 23, 1944:

"Members of the French resistance movement who appear together with the enemy troops in closed units on the fronts and are clearly identified as combatants by armbands or other insignia are to be treated as combatants with immediate effect in accordance with the Hague Land Warfare Convention."

Was the great, severe suffering that the French resistance movement brought upon its

own supporters and upon large sections of the French civilian population worth it? Not in military terms. General Montgomery is said to have stated that the collaboration of the French resistance groups had accelerated the liberation of France by forty-eight hours; Eisenhower is said to have spoken of one to two weeks. In any case, it is certain that the Anglo-American forces, with their enormous material superiority, would have forced the German Wehrmacht to retreat from France with or without the "Forces Francaises de l'Interieur". Even the acts of sabotage and espionage by the French resistance movement did not carry much weight compared to the destruction of strategically important facilities by the American bombers and the reports of the purely British intelligence organizations.

Was the resistance movement necessary for moral reasons? Was it necessary to rebuild French national sentiment after the defeat suffered in 1940? It is difficult for a foreigner to pass judgment on this;

To the Germans who held positions of responsibility in Paris during the war, it would appear that the Vichy government's resistance to the occupying power, precisely because of its conciliatory forms, had a much more beneficial effect on France.

Were the resistance supporters heroes, as they were celebrated by Allied propaganda, were they criminals, as they were branded by German propaganda? Both views contain some truth. Like all extremist groups working illegally, the French resistance movement included people who were inspired by the highest patriotic and political ideals, but there were also elements in its ranks who were only interested in satisfying a low desire for revenge, robbery and murder. Even the collaborationist groups and the French militia, which fought the resistance movement, had not been able to keep themselves free of such elements.

In the ranks of the French resistance movement were men like the Schill officers, who wanted to liberate their fatherland from foreign rule; men like Albert Leo Schlageter, who were prepared to do anything for their nation, but also to make any sacrifice; men like the German Baltic fighters, who upheld their country's honor in arms even after defeat. However, the terrorism of the Spanish Civil War had also crept into the French resistance movement; it would eventually gain the upper hand.

Personally, I thought that the path of understanding between France and Germany was also the right one for the time of the Second World War; I would probably have taken this path even as a Frenchman. But this does not prevent me from saying that there were men in the French resistance movement who I regretted were not in the German camp.

July 20 in Paris

When I was a guest of the "Justice Militaire" in Baden-Baden for a few days at the beginning of November 1945 after my arrest in the Black Forest, a French interrogation officer told me: "We know very well that you have not committed any war crimes and, on the contrary, have done a great deal of good in France. But you are guilty of a great crime, and that is why you will be severely punished: You were able to get close to Hitler, and you did not assassinate him."

I wanted to reply that not everyone had the temperament of a Brutus and that even Brutus had waited until Caesar had established his world empire before committing murder. But the establishment of a world empire was never Hitler's intention, and he offered few other points of comparison with the Roman emperor, whose successors first made Caesar's madness proverbial. But what else was there to say to the accusation that he was not of July 20th? The oath of allegiance I had sworn to Hitler as a civil servant? My opinion that only loyal, open resistance was compatible with this oath of allegiance? That I had not neglected this loyal opposition to Hitler, Ribbentrop, Göring, Keitel, Goebbels, Ley and the various Gauleiters who ruled in France when the reputation and interests of the Reich appeared to be endangered in my area of responsibility? During the twelve months that I was withdrawn from my ambassadorial post in Paris - November 1942 to December 1943 - but especially during my second "disgrace" from the end of March to the beginning of May 1944, various Berlin friends, particularly from literary and artistic circles, informed me of their activities in resistance groups that maintained contact with army leaders on the Eastern Front. The way the Reich government was treating me, they said, must have finally opened my eyes to the fact that under the National Socialist regime the France policy I advocated could never be realized. I always replied - without realizing that I was committing plagiarism - that the term "disgrace" did not exist in the vocabulary of a free German; with a free German one would at most fall into disgrace, but he himself would not fall into disgrace, but if I had indeed fallen into disgrace with Hitler and Ribbentrop, this would not be a reason for them to fall into disgrace with me as well; I still reserved that decision for myself. I seem to have once given this answer to an agent provocateur, for I learned later by chance that it had come to Himmler's attention; he had long

I wavered as to whether he should punish the dishonor associated with my statement or recognize the declaration of loyalty it contained. It was at least symptomatic that an acquaintance interrogated in the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin in the summer of 1943 for alleged anti-state and anti-party activities was told as the last incriminating moment: "You are also a friend of Ambassador Abetz."

I was completely unaware at the time that there were widespread secret resistance circles in the Foreign Office. In retrospect, I regret that they were so "secretive" and that their supporters - at least vis-à-vis France - never made or advocated statements on foreign policy issues that deviated from the Führer's headquarters and Ribbentrop. The officials of Wilhelmstrasse, from whom the German Embassy in Paris found support in its conflicts with the Reich government and the Party, did not belong to the resistance circles that later became known.

In France, I first noticed a fiercely oppositional attitude in Marshal Rommel. A few days before the start of the invasion of Normandy, he invited me to dinner at his staff quarters in La Roche-Guyon near Mantes, and we talked about the military and political situation late into the night. The conversation was along the lines of an exchange of views that we had initiated via a liaison officer on his staff, a regimental comrade of Rommel's from the First World War, and in which I had conveyed to the Marshal my concerns about the foreign policy situation and he had conveyed to me his concerns about the military conduct of the war.

The embassy secretary who accompanied me to the invitation to La Roche-Guyon had been seriously wounded in El Alamein. The conversation turned immediately after dinner to the vicissitudes of the Libyan campaign, and Rommel had very harsh words for Göring, who had not fulfilled his promise to procure fuel, but also for Hitler, whose nonsensical counter-order had forced the Afrika Korps to halt in the middle of an orderly strategic retreat and thus made the catastrophe inevitable.

For me as a civilian, the forecast that Field Marshal Rommel made about the imminent Anglo-Saxon invasion of France was very valuable. In Berlin, he said, they could hardly wait for the moment of this landing, as they were certain that it would be defeated victoriously. He did not share this optimism. The German defenses on the Channel and Atlantic coasts were not sufficiently staggered in depth and contained no precautions against enemy airborne operations; the mines in the coastal waters that could be used for enemy landings were also inadequately prepared. In contrast to Berlin, he therefore hoped that the Anglo-Saxon invasion would come as late as possible and that he would have enough time to fill the gaps in the German defenses. If the enemy succeeded in gaining a foothold on one point of the coast for more than two days, the situation would have to be regarded as very serious and the loss of France would have to be reckoned with. Rommel had

certainly did not earn himself the reputation of a "defeatist" through his dashing bravado in the Western campaign and in North Africa. I was therefore astonished to encounter the same pessimism in him as I had shortly before in Field Marshal von Rundstedt, who was already regarded as a cautious man because of his age. At his headquarters in Saint-Germain, I had to introduce two Foreign Service officers to the "Commander-in-Chief West" who, at the request of Wilhelmstrasse, were to be called in for the interrogation of English officers taken prisoner during the invasion. "If only we don't get caught," said the experienced army commander with a thoughtful expression on his face, as I left on my mission.

The predictions of the two field marshals were all too likely to come true. The invasion began on June 6. By the evening of the first day of fighting, the enemy had already formed a bridgehead 25 kilometers wide and 10 kilometers deep between Caen and Bayeux. The German land forces and the few available air force units outdid themselves with heroic bravery in the defense and counterattacks. However, the enemy's towering superiority in terms of material and his absolute air superiority meant that his advance could not be halted. The transportation of reinforcements and supplies from England across the Channel to Normandy could be carried out on a route marked with buoys and illuminated at night with searchlights. Cherbourg fell on June 25 and St.-Lô on July 19; it was only a matter of days before the "Norman counter-visit" would extend into the interior of France.

At this point, the military commander, General Heinrich von Stülpnagel, invited me to dinner in his Parisian quarters, the Hotel Raphael. The invitation came as a surprise; the general had contracted severe dysentery during the Eastern campaign and had therefore not accepted or extended any invitations to meals for months. I was his only guest; about an hour and a half after dinner he called in the head of his command staff, Colonel von Linstow, for a chat. After discussing the military situation, as suggested by the reports coming in from the front, General von Stülpnagel spoke very strongly about the Führer's headquarters. No one had the courage to energetically point out the shortcomings to Hitler, and Keitel would only say his usual "Yes, my Führer" to every statement. In all areas, the highest military and political leadership of the Reich had made irreparable mistakes and maneuvered Germany into such a hopeless situation that one had to ask oneself whether it could go on like this. In France, too, the course of violence ordered by Hitler had destroyed all foundations for a good understanding between the two countries.

I replied to General von Stülpnagel that he already knew my position on these problems from the time when he was still head of the Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden; the Führer's headquarters had

Indeed, for years and years Hitler has left no stone unturned in his efforts to counteract the well-understood German interests in France. In my opinion, responsible men from all military and civilian departments should take a simultaneous joint step with Hitler to try to persuade him to change his method of government; he should be advised to stop interfering in all military and political details, but to give the heads of the various departments the necessary freedom of decision to carry out their missions. I would be available at any time for such a joint step in the area of French policy; I had experienced for myself that Hitler was not as inaccessible to well-founded objections, which were put forward with great determination, as is generally claimed. At first, he would probably roar and disgrace the person concerned, but after a while he would consider the arguments put forward against him. General von Stülpnagel denied the possibility of the success of such ideas in the military field. So our conversation stopped at this question.

A few days later, when the attempted insurrection against Hitler was launched and it turned out that General von Stülpnagel was involved in this attempt in France in a leading position, I asked myself whether the purpose of the evening invitation had not been to determine whether I would be hostile or friendly towards this undertaking. I also thought I could interpret a visit made to me shortly beforehand at the embassy by Quartermaster General Wagner in this sense.

The first news of the events of July 20th reached me through German radio; I was not informed of them through official channels. When the rumor circulated in Paris in the evening that Hitler had been assassinated, I noticed that this false report did not cause any consternation among the embassy staff, even among the official who was on night duty and had been a member of the party since before 1933.

I first heard about the arrest of the SS leaders by the military commander from an employee of the embassy who was returning from duty. His apartment was in a side street off Avenue Foch, where the staff buildings of the German security police were located. He was stopped by a military patrol on Avenue Foch. When he identified himself as a member of the embassy, he was given permission to pass through the street, but immediately

returned to report the incident to me.

The arrests were carried out by the commander of the Paris guard regiment, General Bremer, a member of the Blood Order, on the orders of the commander of Greater Paris, General von Boineburg-Lengsfeld, who in turn was following an order from the military commander in France, General von Stülpnagel. The arrests were carried out without any resistance. The Higher SS and Police Leader was surprised while working at his desk in his staff quarters on Boulevard Lannes. In front of one of the In the office building of the commander of the Security Police and the SD in Avenue Foch, a single shot was fired; it was fired by a Volksdeutsche SS guard who had presented his rifle to General Bremer, who had entered the building, in too dashing a manner.

After I had been informed of the roadblock in Avenue Foch by the embassy employee mentioned above, I telephoned the military commander to find out more about the events. An aide told me that General von Stülpnagel had gone to see Field Marshal von Kluge and was not expected back in Paris before midnight. I then had my visit announced for midnight.

At the appointed hour I entered the military commander's office building, but only saw General von Stülpnagel and Colonel von Linstow a few moments before Gruppenführer Oberg and Standartenführer Knochen "reported back from custody". They stood opposite each other in two groups. The Higher SS and Police Leader expressed to the military commander his vivid displeasure at the arrests of the SS leaders.

I tried to ease the tension and advised everyone involved to sit around a table. This suggestion was followed. I explained that whatever might have happened in Berlin and at the Führer's headquarters, here in France, where the bloody and decisive Normandy battle was raging, all German units had to form a united front. Turning to Gruppenführer Oberg, I said that General von Stülpnagel believed in Himmler's ambitious plans for power and might therefore have suspected the SS behind the assassination attempt; the imprisonment he had imposed on the SS leaders was then not in contradiction to his military oath of allegiance to Hitler. General von Stülpnagel remained silent about this interpretation, which I tried to give to his action. Gruppenführer Oberg severely reproached me for questioning the loyalty of the SS in my interpretation. Nevertheless, the two parties calmed down somewhat. Since Frenchmen had witnessed the operations against the German police and SS quarters, the propaganda slogan was issued that these had been military training maneuvers for the capture of blocks of houses in the event of street fighting.

After July 20, the commander of the Paris Guard Regiment, General Bremer, was transferred out of France, as was the commander of Greater Paris, General von Boineburg-Lengsfeld. The Chief of Staff of the Military Command, Lieutenant Colonel von Hofacker, and the Quartermaster General of the Western Command, Colonel Finckh, were brought before the People's Court in Berlin and executed.

General von Stülpnagel received a summons to the Führer's headquarters. He ordered his driver to stop a few kilometers from Verdun and stay with the car; he wanted to visit the battlefield where he had fought as a young lieutenant in the 1914/18 war. A few minutes later, the chauffeur heard a revolver shot. He thought the general had been attacked by terrorists and hurried over; after a short search he found the military commander

floating unconscious in a body of water. General von Stülpnagel had wanted to shoot himself through the temple in the same movement and then let himself be carried away by the current, but he had only hit his eyes. The chauffeur took the blind man to the German military hospital in Verdun. General von Stülpnagel did not succumb to his wounds there, but was transported to Germany and executed on the basis of a verdict by the Berlin People's Court.

The fact that a chivalrous and conscientious soldier like General von Stülpnagel, that a loyal soldier like Marshal Rommel, the most popular commander of the Second World War, was driven by his conscience to participate in a coup d'état, will remain an eternal indictment of a state system and a state leadership that could no longer tolerate independent opinions and dismissed warnings arising from the deepest sense of responsibility as defeatist nagging. The more difficult a government's tasks become, the less it can do without the advice of the opposition. However, the National Socialist government believed that it had to ignore critical voices even more than before, especially after the setbacks it had suffered.

When political passions are involved, cause and effect are easily confused. I cannot presume to judge the causes and effects of July 20th on the Eastern front; that it was not the cause but the consequence of the military collapse in the West seems to me beyond question. Perhaps, however, the internal connections will be misjudged later on, and the circles that were the authors of the stab-in-the-back legend of November 9, 1918, will become the victims of a stab-in-the-back legend of July 20, 1944.

The attempt to remove Hitler at the risk of a civil war would have been justifiable if it could have ended the external war under less catastrophic conditions for Germany. Subsequent statements by Allied statesmen suggest that this justification would not have been forthcoming. Among the Germans who, unaware of the mentality of the enemy powers, attempted to remove Hitler by force, however, there were just as passionate patriots as among the Germans who, knowing the mentality of the enemy powers, condemned this attempt.

In January 1949, I was summoned to London as a witness in the investigation proceedings initiated against Field Marshal von Rundstedt. An English major asked me on this occasion how it could be explained that everywhere where there had been "July 20", the SS had immediately pursued and arrested those involved in the conspiracy on their own initiative; only in Paris had the SS not taken any immediate countermeasures and arrests had only been carried out when explicit orders to do so had arrived from Berlin and the Führer's headquarters. I replied to the British Major that the difference in attitude on this question could probably only be explained by the fact that the Higher SS and Police Leader and the commander of the Security Police and SD in France had not quite corresponded to the image that had been formed of them.

of SS leaders of this rank in other countries.

During the hours that Gruppenführer Oberg and Standartenführer Knochen were under arrest, the sandbags were already being set up in the courtyard of the Ecole Militaire in Paris, in front of which the senior SS leaders were to be shot the next morning after a summary court-martial. After his release from prison, however, Dr. Knochen had immediately and unhesitatingly offered his hand in reconciliation to Colonel von Linstow,

who had been somewhat upset by the failure of the attack in Berlin. SS-Obergruppenführer Oberg endeavored to keep the Berlin special commission charged with investigating the July 20th cases in France away from General von Stülpnagel; to this end, he himself paid him a visit from one World War participant to another; later, he personally campaigned to have the clan detention imposed on the general's widow and her three children in Germany lifted.

This attitude was an expression of a certain truce that had developed between the heads of the leading German departments in Paris over the course of the occupation years and which could come as a surprise given the German tendency towards fratricidal strife and disputes over authority. The heads of the German agencies and staffs in Paris were rarely at feud with each other; however, they often formed a common front against their headquarters in Berlin and their superiors in the Führer's headquarters, as well as against special representatives and subordinate services who received direct instructions from the Reich ministries, the party and the Führer's headquarters for their activities in France. The establishment of an independent representation of the Führer's headquarters in occupied France must naturally have been undesirable to the military commander; but one of the few conflicts in which the Embassy came into conflict with General von Stülpnagel was the question of the authorization of the tricolour and the Marseillaise in occupied territory, which I had advocated and which he had refused. From a political point of view, I was perhaps right in my opinion that the national symbols should not be left to the resistance movement; from a military point of view, General von Stülpnagel's view that only the flag of the occupying power should be flown in an operational area was certainly sound, because the playing of the local national anthem on public occasions could provoke the public into unpredictable demonstrations. Apart from such differences of opinion, however, there was broad agreement between the military commander and the embassy on the political line to be taken towards France.

When a "Higher SS and Police Leader in France" was appointed in the spring of 1942, the Parisian authorities working on a sensible regulation of Franco-German relations received the news with undisguised concern. Göring had announced a significant tightening of the policy towards France. The extension of the powers of the SS underlined this intention in no uncertain terms. However, SS-Gruppenführer Oberg generally disappointed the unpleasant expectations attached to his appointment. His police mission to maintain public peace and order required him to take measures that did not always coincide with the Embassy's mission to maintain and create a favorable political climate for Germany. However, I am telling the truth when I say that Higher SS and Police Leader Oberg showed more understanding towards my task than I did towards his.

The commander of the Security Police and the SD, Standartenführer Dr. Knochen, had come to France immediately after the occupation of Paris in June 1940 to expand the political intelligence service. As a Schellenberg man from the foreign intelligence service, police matters were far from his mind. His main focus was on politics, including high politics. If he sometimes devoted his active interest to problems whose handling was reserved for the embassy, he nevertheless tried to adhere to the political line of the embassy and thus placed himself in open opposition to his superiors in the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin - as in the question of support for the moderate Laval government, for example. In very many cases involving the granting of relief and the improvement of

living conditions for the French population, I have found Dr. Knochen to be more understanding than some of the personalities and services involved in July 20th.

The willingness to communicate in terms of foreign policy, which was common to all German agencies and staffs that had become familiar with the French situation despite their different attitudes towards the National Socialist regime, also proved itself when military orders were issued from above to destroy the bridges over the Seine and the gas, water and electricity works that were vital for supplying the population. The military situation had already deteriorated by this time, so that a defense of Paris could no longer be considered. It was to be expected that the enemy would appear in front of the city from one day to the next, whether from the west or the south.

On July 31, 1944, Patton's army succeeded in breaking through at Avranches; over a terrain in which the edges of the bomb craters not only touched but even overlapped and in which the weapons of the few surviving heroic German defenders were buried or rendered useless by the air pressure, thousands of American tanks rolled towards the interior of France. By August 5, most of Brittany had already been sealed off; on August 9, Patton launched an assault on Paris via Alençon and Le Mans.

On August 15, 1944, the Allied landings began on the French Mediterranean coast near Cannes and St. Raphael. General de Lattre de Tassigny, <Iri who had been captured by the Vichy regime in November 1942 after his failed resistance attempt, but had escaped from prison in spring 1945 and fled to North Africa, ended up at the head of the later "Première Armée d'Alsace" in Saint-Tropez. On August 16, 1944, Paris was cleared of all civilian and non-operational military agencies and staffs. On August 17, Hitler ordered the withdrawal of the German forces in southern and southwestern France to the Orleans-Bourges-Montpellier line; on August 18, their withdrawal to the Saône-Marne line. At the same time, Patton's army tanks were already reported from the direction of Chartres and south of the French capital from the vicinity of Melun.

Even though all German authorities and staff in Paris had openly spoken out against the planned destruction of the French capital since the end of July, the credit for not carrying out the orders goes to General von Choltitz, who was appointed commander of Greater Paris at the beginning of August. He was in good company in his decision to avoid the destruction of Paris by defensive measures that had become militarily pointless. When the German armies had advanced into the Ile-de-France in the second phase of the Western campaign, Churchill had demanded in a meeting with the French government at Conde Castle on June 13, 1940, just like Hitler, that the French capital be defended "block by block", which would also have meant its destruction. General Weygand, however, pointed out to the English Prime Minister that a city of millions could not be held militarily without a constant, strong supply of men and material. The great soldier prevailed with his objection. Two days later, Paris was declared an open city.

I had received instructions from Ribbentrop to leave Paris with the embassy staff on August 17 and to accompany the French government, which had been transferred to Beaufort. The departure took place in the late evening hours. Under the cover of night, I left the motorcade unnoticed behind Meaux to stay at the embassy for a few more days with three members of staff. General von Choltitz had asked me to assist him with my political advice in his decisions, which were fraught with responsibility. So in the last days of my

mission in France, I once again performed the same function as in the first days: the function of "Representative of the Foreign Office to the Military Commander in Paris". As a result of the sudden evacuation, numerous French employees of various German offices had remained in the city who wanted to find refuge in the Reich and for whom my small staff was able to obtain the necessary papers and means of transportation at the last minute.

These last days in Paris prompted many reflections and comparisons with the first days of the occupation. Once again, in the west, a dark cloud against a bright summer sky, a gigantic plume of smoke loomed over the city: the same petrol depot in the suburb of St. Ouen that had been hit in June 1940.

The bomb that had detonated the Luftwaffe's bombing range had now been hit by Royal Air Force bombs. On the morning of August 19, shooting began in various streets and squares. A machine-gun nest in the Tuileries Garden covered the Konkordienplatz, the Konkordienbrücke and also sent a few sheaves over to the embassy opposite. While the bullets whistled over their heads, anglers sat motionless on the banks of the Seine, just as they had sat there in peace, waiting for the fish that would never bite, as they had sat there during the years of occupation and as they will probably still sit there today. The embassy was also occasionally shot at from the side of the street from the lowered shutters of the Rue de Lille, but the occasional appearance of the small tank from the German base at the Chambre des Deputés was enough to silence the fire for a while. Even in neighborhoods where the shooting threatened to take on more serious forms, the majority of the population continued to go about their business calmly, and the young girls riding their bicycles through the streets let the skirts of their light dresses flutter behind them more carefree than ever.

But blood was already flowing in the red suburbs; in the heart of the city, resistance fighters were entrenched in the town hall, the prefecture of police and the Louvre. Through the mediation of the Swedish Consul General Nordling, a kind of truce was reached between the commander of Greater Paris and the "Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur", but this was quickly broken by the latter and never recognized by the communist "Franc-Tireurs Travailleurs et Partisans", who were already contesting their leadership.

One of the strangest phenomena of those days was the building of barricades. Were they built because the head of the French Resistance Committee, Georges Bidault, was a history professor by training, or had the revolutionary legacy of the grandfathers and great-grandfathers naturally survived in certain Parisian neighborhoods? In any case, the barricades were erected in exactly the same places and from exactly the same material as during the Commune of '70 and the revolutionary days of 1848 and 1830. General von Choltitz's Tigers, who only kept the main thoroughfares open for the passage of stragglers of scattered German troops, were too busy with their mission to overrun the obstacles they had been assigned in the historic city center. They also avoided the bloodbath that they could easily have caused among the population, which had been prematurely stirred up by irresponsible leadership.

I left Paris on the night of August 21-22. As soon as I arrived in Beifort, I was summoned to the Führer's headquarters. As I had not left Paris with the embassy and the French government as instructed, rumors had spread in Berlin that I had gone over to the enemy. Investigations into my whereabouts, which had been ordered by Ribbentrop out of

personal concern, had already taken on the character of manhunts in lower instances.

The French Government Commission in Sigmaringen

After the breakthrough at Avranches on July 31, 1944, France had to be considered militarily lost. In some of the coastal bases declared by Hitler as "fortresses", in Dunkirk, Calais, Cap Gris Nez, Boulogne, Le Havre, Brest, Lorient, St. Nazaire, Royan and at the mouth of the Gironde, the garrisons and the reinforcements that had joined them fought back, in some cases until May 1945, with all their strength and the greatest bravery; but the interior of the country lay open to the enemy. The plan of the Führer's headquarters to stabilize the front along the lines of the 1914-1918 war of position also proved to be illusory. On the evening of August 22nd, as I passed the line of positions from the First World War east of Verdun, I saw Landes schützen digging trenches over a long stretch, which in most places were only a few centimeters deep. It was not to be hoped that the tanks of Patton's army would give the Wehrmacht the necessary time to expand this defense system.

The military problem in France was now accompanied by a political problem. Who should take over the government after the occupation of the country by the Allies? The Algiers Committee under the leadership of de Gaulle? The Resistance movement within the country, in which communist influences were increasingly making themselves felt? A legal successor to the Vichy government that would suit the Anglo-Americans?

Berlin remained silent on this question. Of the three possibilities, the latter seemed to me personally to be the least evil. I therefore supported the plan brought to me by Laval at the beginning of August to convene the National Assembly. This was to decide into whose hands the affairs of government should be placed during the turbulent months that France was to face in domestic politics. The National Assembly would disavow Laval, and probably Petain as well, and entrust power to politicians of the Third Republic who could count on the support of the Anglo-Saxon democracies.

Such a solution would have been in the best interests of France, the Western Allies and Germany itself - such paradoxes do exist. It would have spared France a bloody civil war or, more correctly, a bloodbath among its elites, who were indispensable for the future of the nation.

The French government would have been able to provide the governmental and administrative services in the rear front area and throughout the French hinterland; Germany could have expected humane treatment of its prisoners of war, the wounded who could not be transported, and the staff assistants who were surprised by the enemy in some places. Finally, a French government experienced in European politics could have supported Churchill when he began to warn Roosevelt not to work too hard into the hands of Soviet Russian imperialism.

In accordance with the constitution, the National Assembly could only be convened by Edouard Herriot, whose mandate as President of the Chamber had been suspended since the transfer of unlimited government powers to Marshal Petain on 10. July 1940, but had not expired. At that meeting in Vichy, Herriot had abstained from voting. He was not

politically active in the period that followed. However, his opposition to the Marshal's government was not in doubt. As he had maintained personal correspondence with Roosevelt even after diplomatic relations between Vichy and the United States had been broken off, he was assigned a forced stay near Paris in 1943 and then in Malgeville near Nancy. This forced stay was lifted in agreement with the commander of the security police and the SD and without consulting the Reich government at Laval's request on August 15, 1944; Laval personally traveled to Malgeville to persuade Herriot to convene the National Assembly and officially introduce him to Paris. Herriot arrived in the capital in the evening hours of August 16, first staying with the Prefect of the Seine. The President of the Chamber's apartment in the Chambre des Deputes, which Herriot wanted to move into, had been seized by an air force squadron, and I was only promised that it would be vacated the next day.

Everything seemed to be going well when suddenly, a few hours after Herriot's arrival in Paris, the commander of the Security Police and the SD received a categorical order from the Reich Security Main Office to immediately take Herriot back into custody and transport him back to his forced detention near Nancy. Berlin had become aware of the plan before a *fait accompli* had been created.

In order to give the German police an alibi for not carrying out the order they had received and to gain time, I tried to obtain Ribbentrop's approving decision by means of a telegraphic report on the night of August 16. I invited Herriot to the embassy for the morning of August 17. However, the reply from the Reich Foreign Minister confirmed - could it have been expected otherwise? - the order of the Reich Security Main Office. After a lunch to which Laval had invited him in the *Presidence du Conseil* in the Hotel Matign< m, and during which the two French statesmen concealed their movement by exchanging personal memories of past times of political activity, Herriot had to return to his captivity in Nancy.

Laval, who, like Herriot himself, lodged a lively protest with me against the decision, declared himself forced to resign by the act of the imperial government. Even before I could report to Berlin, a new instruction from Ribbentrop arrived that the French government had to be transferred from Paris to Beifort with or against its consent. Envoy von Renthe-Fink, who had been appointed Special Representative of the Foreign Office to Marshal Petain in Vichy in December 1943, received a corresponding instruction from the Reich Foreign Minister regarding the French head of state.

I left my assignment with mixed feelings. The hoped-for political solution had not materialized. Since the convening of the French National Assembly had been prevented by Berlin, the members of the French government in Paris were in danger of being murdered by the partisans of the resistance movement before a legal public authority could be re-established. If there was any possibility at all of holding the front, Beifort was the last town on French soil that had any prospect of being behind the front line. However, if the German resistance also collapsed west of the Vosges, the fact that the Swiss border was very close could make it easier for the French ministers to cross over into neutral territory if necessary.

When I returned to the *Presidence du Conseil* with Ribbentrop's new directive, the Council of Ministers was in session. The cabinet members present decided to bow only to

force, declared their solidarity with Laval and resigned.

Before leaving the capital, Laval received the mayors of Paris and transferred the power of government in France to the prefects as the heads of the local administration. After arriving in Beifort, he entrusted the representation of the interests of French prisoners of war and civilian workers in Germany to a special delegation, which was chaired by Fernand de Brinon and included Marcel Deat, Joseph Darnand and Jean Luchaire, and which took the name "French Government Commission". Jacques Doriot and his staff had retired to Neustadt an der Hardt.

I spent the last week of August and the first week of September at the Führer's headquarters, where the members of the "French Government Commission" and Jacques Doriot were to be presented to Hitler. The reception took place in mid-September. I had not seen Hitler for a long time and was amazed at how much he had slumped in the meantime. He walked leaning heavily forward; his right hand, in its hesitant, inward-curved gestures, betrayed the after-effects of the July 20 injury; the new wooden floorboards and a removed side wall of the small reception room of his bunker still pointed to the assassination attempt. Ambassador Hewel told me that Hitler was becoming increasingly unsociable and had been eating most of his meals alone for several months. He also told me that he was very concerned about the health effects of the far too frequent and excessive doses of

Hormone injections, which Hitler had his personal physician give him; they increased him into unpredictable states of excitement, which were then followed by moments of even deeper depression and apathy.

The introduction of the members of the French government commission seemed to coincide with such a moment. Hitler was amiable, but completely apathetic. There was no longer a single spark of the magnetic power in his eyes that had once been theirs.

A few minutes before the reception of the foreign guests, Hitler had me briefly give him details of the evacuation of Paris. "It is a good thing that the bridges over the Seine were not blown up," he remarked with an absent expression, "I found out too late about the blowing up of the beautiful bridge over the Arno in Florence to be able to prevent it." Was the man who had personally ordered the destruction of Paris just a few weeks earlier suffering from an advanced split consciousness?

In conversation with the French guests, Hitler digressed into the pre-war period. "The year of the Paris World Exhibition in 1937 was the happiest in Franco-German relations; I would have liked to visit this exhibition if it had been possible in an unobtrusive way." A brief reminder of Montoire: "At that time, I made a great sacrifice to understanding with your country when I rejected Franco's claim to French Morocco the day before in Hendaye!" Finally, at the very end of the reception, a forced, unconvincing flare-up of energy as he touched on the current situation: "The German army has already stood in the Siegfried Line and launched an attack from it."

I was left with a strange impression from this stay at the Führer's headquarters, which was to be my last: Hitler's wolfhound. The more shy Hitler became of people, the more he became attached to this animal. Dogs sometimes take on something of the nature of their masters. The still young animal stood behind the wire mesh of its enclosure near the Führerbunker, trembling nervously and uttering plaintive, irritated noises, even at people it

knew well through daily contact.

Even before my departure from the Führer's headquarters, the Reich government decided to relocate Marshal Petain and the abdicated French ministers from the militarily endangered Beifort to the Reich territory. The choice fell on Sigmaringen. The candidacy of a prince of the Hohenzollern branch residing there for the Spanish throne had triggered the war of 1870/71; now, at the end of a new Franco-German war, the small town on the mountain bank of the Danube took in a French marshal, a resigned French cabinet, a French government commission and several hundred French political refugees as involuntary guests within its walls.

For the official French personalities, the protocol of the Foreign Office had the castle of Sigmaringen confiscated; in its various wings and floors, in the hotels of the small town and in the private quarters, the atmosphere of every political emigration soon prevailed, making some differences stand out even more sharply than before in *1 lei matlande*.

Even the dispute between Doriot and the Vichy government continued on German soil, although Laval and his ministers had been replaced by members of the "French Government Commission" who were much more open to Fascist and National Socialist ideas. Jacques Doriot and his staff had not moved to Sigmaringen, but to the island of Mainau; he maintained his own radio station, published his own magazine and newspaper and was given a direct representative of the Foreign Office in the form of envoy Reinebeck from Ribbentrop's ministerial office.

Doriot's goal was to replace the "French Government Commission" with a "French Liberation Committee" led by him; he found the support of Himmler, Dr. Goebbels and various Gauleiters, especially Bürckel and Sauckel.

I took the view that Doriot's "Liberation Committee" should look after the more than ten thousand French political refugees who sympathized with Germany, but that it would be more appropriate to leave the representation of the interests of the one million French prisoners of war and the five hundred thousand French civilian workers to the more politically neutral delegation still appointed by the Vichy government. With the increasing deterioration of the mood among foreigners in the Reich, the well-established apparatus seemed to me to offer a greater guarantee of smooth communication with the 10 million French in Germany than a new, emphatically party-political organization.

In mid-November 1944, however, the Reich Foreign Minister decided in favor of Jacques Doriot's "Liberation Committee" - perhaps under the impression of the Ardennes offensive, which had been promising success for a few days. He dismissed me from my post and transferred the management of the German Embassy in Sigmaringen to Envoy Reinebeck. I asked Ribbentrop to have my UK position rescinded and to release me for the Wehrmacht. He replied that I should remain at his disposal for political assignments. If the enemy crossed the Rhine and the front was moved to the interior of southwest Germany, he wanted me to form a *maquis* behind the French lines in the Black Forest. If necessary, he was also thinking of entrusting me with the task of peace advocacy with political figures in neutral countries. Finally, he might also need my services in matters relating to French political refugees.

In person, Ribbentrop's warmth at these openings was almost the same as I had known

him to be in the early days of our collaboration. However, he gave me the impression of a man suffering both mentally and physically, whose faith and energy were broken. During one of the last more open-minded conversations - it had been in the spring or summer of 1942 at the Führer's headquarters in East Prussia - Ribbentrop had made a remark to me that may also have been responsible for the behavior and the slow inner

The decline of other personalities in Hitler's entourage can provide a certain amount of information. "The Führer," Ribbentrop explained, "has expressed the wish that I move to his headquarters in the 'Wolf's Lair'⁽⁴⁾; but I have deliberately set up my field quarters here, thirty kilometers away from there; if I were in the immediate vicinity of the Führer every hour of the day and night, I would be completely worn down and worn out."

I made my last visit to the Reich capital before the collapse at the end of March. During this visit I learned that in a wing of the Reich Chancellery, which had already been torn open by bombs, the glass plates of the color photographs of the great monuments of Germany's past were still stored in hundreds of small boxes. When the systematic bombing of the entire Reich began, Hitler had given the order to photograph the interiors of the most important buildings in the Reich in particular; in some cases, the photographers were only a few hours ahead of the destruction. These photographs, among which the church wall and ceiling paintings of the Baroque period were particularly well represented, could one day become of the same cultural interest to later generations as the finds from Herculaneum and Pompeii; I arranged for them to be brought to the Black Forest on a truck by art-loving acquaintances before the Russians invaded. One set of these color photographs, which the parish priest of St. Blasien took into his care, was confiscated by the French military shortly after the occupation; a second set, which was kept by the Archbishop of Freiburg, seems to have been preserved. Some newspapers and magazines, believing they had to satisfy the romantic needs of their readership if they did not obey other motives, later published, among other flights of fancy, that this truck contained the "gold of the Reich government", which had been taken to the German embassy in Paris during the war - why was not explained.

Of the three tasks Ribbentrop had indicated to me in January 1945, none were carried out. I did not receive any instructions for the deployment of peace feelers; given the completely hopeless military situation of the Reich, such attempts would certainly have met with even less interest in the enemy camp than in previous years. Ribbentrop's idea of forming a "maquis" in the Black Forest was also completely outdated by military developments; by the beginning of April the enemy armies had already penetrated so deeply into south-west Germany that a stabilization of the front could no longer be expected in this area either. The third task, which was very close to my personal heart and which did not lose its importance as the military situation developed, but became more urgent from day to day, was the evacuation of French people who sympathized with Germany from the territory of the Reich to neutral countries.

I was unable to devote myself to this work because one month after I was recalled from Sigmaringen, the Reichsaußenminister also forbade me to stay in this city and any kind of contact with French personalities and organizations. Doriot had encountered resistance among his compatriots when he replaced the "French Reconstruction Commission" with the "French Liberation Committee"; by banning me,

the Reich government wanted to prevent these Frenchmen from seeking support from me. So I was unable to help either the official personalities in Sigmaringen or the private political refugees to leave Germany.

In October 1944, I had suggested in Berlin that foreign currency from the Foreign Office be made available to at least enable French refugees who were unable to work, as well as women and children, to cross over into Switzerland. Although I justified my proposal with the accommodation difficulties in the areas already overcrowded with German evacuees, it was interpreted as defeatism and therefore rejected. At the beginning of April 1945, when the enemy troops were only half a day's march away from where I was staying in the Black Forest, a courier brought me part of the old secret fund of the German Embassy in Paris. I was able to use it to provide some French and Belgian refugees I could still reach with funds for their onward journey to third countries. I hid the rest of the fund with former employees of the embassy and asked them to hand it over to a newly formed German government in the event of my arrest; however, it was identified and confiscated by the Allied occupation authorities before the new government was formed.

If my suggestion had been complied with in the fall of 1944 and the requested funds had been made available at that time, the political refugees could have found shelter in neutral countries in time; as it was, the majority of them fell into the hands of Allied armies in the Bavarian-Austrian Alpine region and in northern Italy and were then handed over to their domestic enemies in France.

Laval and some of his ministers flew from South Tyrol to Spain; when the Madrid government refused the right of asylum, de Valera offered the former French Prime Minister asylum in Ireland. Laval turned down the offer and had himself handed over to de Gaulle by Franco. Marshal Petain left Sigmaringen for Switzerland with the intention, planned from the outset, of turning himself in to the "Provisional Government" in Paris for trial.

The other France

When General de Gaulle made his way from the Arc de Triomphe to Notre-Dame on August 25, 1944, accompanied by the ringing of church bells and amidst the trellis of an immense crowd, the hearts of many Parisians, who had given Marshal Petain a no less enthusiastic welcome during a surprise visit to the capital just a few weeks earlier, beat faster. After long years of war, who would not rejoice at the liberation of the fatherland from a foreign occupying power, even if the latter had generally been obliging to the population and had not got on too badly with them?

On the eve of de Gaulle's entry into Paris, Jacques Duclos, the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, declared to his political comrades: "We will let the General ride down the Champs-Élysées and then seize power." The head of the provisional French government walked down the triumphal avenue of the capital and was only prepared to share power with the Communists, but not to cede it to them. Nevertheless, he remained in their hands. Even if many of General de Gaulle's government measures cannot be excused by this relationship of dependence, they can at least be explained to a large extent by it.

As long as de Gaulle was in London, his supporters consisted mainly of political

partisans of the Third Republic who had emigrated or fled to England between 1940 and 1942. The only leading Communist who had joined him was the deputy Grenier, in order to secure the cooperation of the national and left-wing revolutionary French resistance groups recommended after the outbreak of war with Soviet Russia. However, when de Gaulle moved his seat from the British capital to Algiers after the Allied landing in French North Africa in November 1942, he had to pay for his greater independence from London with an increasing dependence on Moscow.

In September 1939, the government of the Third Republic had already sent a large number of communist chamber deputies, departmental and city councillors to North Africa for protective custody; the Vichy government was no less successful in this respect than its predecessor. When the Anglo-Americans occupied French North Africa, they dissolved the camps of the communist prisoners, some of whom had been used to build the trans-Saharan railroad. Thus it came about that the supporters of the Third International in the "Consultative Assembly"

very quickly formed not only an active minority in Algiers, but also an absolute majority. The French colonial army and the French administration continued to provide strong opposition to the head of the "Comite Francais de la Liberation Nationale" even after North Africa had officially broken away from Vichy; General de Gaulle was therefore dependent on the protective alliance with the communist elements to consolidate his position. If the resulting ever-increasing radicalization of the Algiers Committee had already led to indescribable violence in the persecution of the French loyal to Vichy in North Africa, it also cast its shadow over metropolitan France.

On October 15, 1945, the "Secretary General of the United Resistance Movement" of Algiers, referring to Charles de Gaulle, issued the following orders to the "regional chiefs and department heads of the French resistance movements in the northern and southern zones":

"A) On day "X"

Day "X" is to be understood as the decisive crisis that was to bring about not only the liberation of the country, but also and above all the disappearance and chastisement of the Vichy regime and its accomplices.

B) Uprising

The uprising is to take place in the short period of time between the departure of the Germans (or their decisive weakening) and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.

The uprising has a purpose:

1. To paralyze the German defense apparatus and the Vichy regime at the same time under all circumstances.

The aim is to prevent any attempt by Petain (which is possible) and Laval (which is his intention but seems problematic) to seize power again.

2. Ensure the removal of all authoritarian officials and their replacement in a few hours.

3. To ensure in a few hours the revolutionary repression of treason in accordance with the legitimate wishes of the resistance fighters for reprisals.

4. To give the provisional government a popular and democratic basis through manifestations of violence and the masses and thus secure international recognition of the

de facto government of General de Gaulle."

Among the implementing provisions of these instructions, the "summary executions" were particularly emphasized among the "special points":

"The whole period before the insurrection should be characterized by a gradual increase in the executions of traitors. The question is to know whether it is desirable that the victorious insurrection should be characterized by executions without judgment.

From now on, a list of the most obvious traitors would be drawn up in each department, whose summary execution would be considered an act of justice by the entire population (this refers to public opinion in general and not to the more radical opinion of the resistance fighters).

By agreement, on day "X" the accused are immediately arrested and executed."

The French resistance movement cannot accuse itself of having insufficiently complied with these orders from the Algiers Committee. From November 1945 onwards, the number of "collaborators" murdered each month grew to 200; with the "Liberation" in August 1944, it rose into the tens of thousands.

"When I was a member of the civilian section of the headquarters of the 7th American Army, which was based in Marseilles during and after the liberation," wrote Donald Robinson in the April 1946 issue of the American Mercury, "I witnessed the Communist terror that reigned in the south of France. It raged from Toulouse to the Italian border. Armed thugs crowded the streets of towns and villages. They drove at breakneck speed in cars whose doors had been removed to make it easier for the occupants to take aim. They searched for anyone who had incurred their enmity."

In the English Catholic weekly "The Tablet" of January 7, 1950, Franc MacMillan devoted the following article to these events under the title "A dishonorable chapter in history":

"As for the violence against many "collaborators" at the time of liberation, it aroused the disapproval of the Allied soldiers and journalists, especially against women. Outside the zones where the Allied authorities had the power to intervene, there was a terror that General de Gaulle did not prevent. The head of the historical department of the American army calculated that 5 0,000 people were murdered in the Mediterranean region alone in 1944 and 1945."

Estimates differ as to the total number of victims during these months. Mitterand, the Minister for Veterans and Pensions in the first cabinet of the "Provisional Government", put the number of "summary executions" carried out by the resistance movement at 97,000; Tixier, the first Minister of the Interior of the Provisional Government, at 105,000. Non-official sources give even higher figures. Criminal charges were only brought against the murderers in 3,000 cases; the family members and friends of the victims ran the risk of being exposed to murders and reprisals by reporting them. The number of people executed on the basis of sentences handed down by the special courts set up by the government is put at 2000.

Justice Minister Teitgen told the chamber in 1947 that Robespierre's terror had been "child's play" compared to the work he had done; the Christian Democrat minister was thus defending himself against an attack

of the Communist MPs, who accused him of not having done enough.

The spirits that General de Gaulle had summoned could not be banished. Although de

Gaulle dissolved the communist "Milices Patriotiques" by government decree in November 1944, the central government was unable to assert itself in the province even after this. Especially south of the Loire, particularly in Toulouse, Lyon, Limoges and Marseille, power remained virtually in the hands of the communist "Com missaires de la Republique" until the spring of 1945.

Even when General de Gaulle resigned as President of the "Provisional Government" in November 1945, a few weeks after the new elections, the Communist influence in the various subsequent "three-party cabinets" remained stronger than the influence of the Socialist and Catholic factions. It was not until the constitutional elections of 1946 and the formation of the "Gouvernement de la Republique Francaise" that there was an increasing estrangement between the national and left-wing revolutionary wings of the French resistance movement in the Chamber and the government. The socialist and Christian-democratic parties left the communists the dominant position in only one area: the administration of justice.

A government decree of September 14, 1944 had decreed the establishment of "Cours de Justice" in the departments, and a government decree of November 18 of the same year had decreed the establishment of the "Haute Cour de Justice" in the capital. The former was responsible for the prosecution of minor cases of "collaboration", the latter for the prosecution of major cases. What these special courts had in common, however, was that the laws made for them had retroactive effect and their jurors had to have belonged to the resistance movement, making them prosecutors and judges in one person and in their own cause. The "Cours de Justice" sentenced one million French citizens to disqualification for "collaboration"; it is unlikely that there were any among this million who would have made use of their lost right to vote for the Communist Party. Deprivation of civil rights was the minimum penalty; in hundreds of thousands of cases, property was confiscated, in tens of thousands of cases, prison sentences of several years to life imprisonment were imposed, and in thousands of cases, death sentences were pronounced and carried out.

The presidents and public prosecutors of these courts belonged to a large 'feil, the jurors almost without exception to the Communist Party. Thus it was no longer a matter of the usual confusion of justice with revenge, but of the deliberate liquidation of persons who were opponents of the Bolshevik doctrine of salvation or who did not appear to be assimilable to it. The perjury of witnesses for the prosecution was not prevented, but regarded as a patriotic act. A lieutenant of the "Forces Francaises de l'Interieur" and former member of the "International Brigades" explained to me that in The elimination of 3 500 000 to 400 000 French nationals was considered necessary in his circles in order to establish a people's republic in France.

The main hatred of this justice system was directed against the members and family members of the "French Volunteer Legion against Bolshevism" and the "French Militia". Many of them were subjected to severe torture before being executed. The same fate was meted out to leaders and supporters of the "French People's Party", the "People's National Rally" and other collaborationist groups.

The "Haute Cour de Justice" prosecuted persons "who, under the official titles of Head of State, Head of Government, Minister, Secretary of State and Under-Secretary of State or in leading ministerial positions, as High Commissioners and Residents, took part in acts of government or sham government in the period from June 17, 1940 until the Provisional

Government moved to the mainland and were guilty of crimes or misdemeanors in the exercise of or on the occasion of their functions".

The head of state, the heads of government, the ministers, secretaries of state and undersecretaries of state of the Vichy regime were automatically indicted by the "Haute Cour de Justice". Whatever one may think of Marshal Petain's government politically, it was the legal government of France. It had received its mandate from an overwhelming majority of the National Assembly; an American ambassador was still accredited to it in November 1942 and diplomatic representatives of neutral countries until its abdication in August 1944. The Provisional Government ignored these facts and declared Marshal Petain's government illegal with retroactive effect. The victor of Verdun was sentenced to death as a traitor to his country and was only not executed because of his advanced age. Prime Minister Laval was deprived of the right to defend himself by the "Haute Cour de Justice". After being sentenced to death, he attempted suicide on death row before his execution at the end of October 1945, but was dragged to the execution stake despite his seriously ill condition. General de Gaulle had ordered that Laval's death sentence had to be carried out in any case. De Brinon and Darnand also fell under the shots of the firing squads. Other ministers of the Vichy government were pardoned for life after being sentenced to death; all were deprived of their civil rights as a minimum punishment.

In addition to the "Cours de Justice" and the "Haute Cour de Justice", the resistance movement also created special government committees to "cleanse" the individual professions of collaborators. The majority of those affected by these measures were thus exposed to economic ruin. In the field of public administration alone, 120000 civil servants were demoted, dismissed and deprived of their pensions for obedience to the Vichy government or collaboration with the occupying power by decision of such "cleansing committees".

"The republic does not need scholars," replied the president of a revolutionary tribunal in 1792, when admirers of the world-famous physicist Lavoisier tried to have the condemned man pardoned. The Jacobins of 1944 also made little fuss about the intellectuals they disliked. Aristide Maillol had to pay with his life for the fact that one of his German pupils had paid the great master a visit in his sculptor's studio in Perpignan during the occupation. The Toulouse philosopher Abbe Sorel and the professor of French literature in Aix-en-Provence Medan were "summarily" executed, while the promising young novelist Robert Brasillach and the naval writer Paul Chack were "executed" following court proceedings. The poet Pierre Drieu La Rochelle escaped his captors by committing suicide; the doctor and ethicist Alexis Carrel died of starvation while in prison and the sociologist Francois Delaisi died of starvation after his release.

The great naturalist and inventor Georges Claude shared the fate of long-term incarceration with members of the Academie Frangaise such as Charles Maurras and Abel Hermant and with theater and film stars such as Le Vigand, Germaine Lubin and Arletty. Decrees issued by the Ministry of Education and the "purge committees" prohibited poets of the stature of Montherlant and Paul Fort from printing their writings, musicians of the fame of Florent Schmitt from organizing concerts, and visual artists of the international renown of Vlaminck, Derain and Despiu from selling and exhibiting their works. It is not known that the numerous Germans who had volunteered for the "Grande Armee" were

executed or imprisoned as "collaborators" after the fall of Napoleon. There is also no news that Goethe subsequently encountered difficulties because of his admiration for the Corsican usurper and that his works were banned.

However, the vast majority of Frenchmen persecuted for "collaboration" were not even guilty of such serious patriotic offenses as the Weimar prince of poets and the young Rhinelanders who had gone into battle with the armies of their western neighbor against Moscow; most of them were far from enthusiastic about Hitler, National Socialist Germany or even the Germany of Goethe and Beethoven. As civil servants, they hoped to ease the lot of the French population by cooperating with the occupying power. As entrepreneurs, they sought to secure work and bread for their employees. As scholars, artists and writers, they cultivated personal relationships with German scholars, artists and writers, just as they had done before the war.

Even among the purely political "collaborators", many followed motives that had nothing whatsoever to do with the party that came to power in Germany in 1933. Like Laval, they had remained followers of Briand's ideas and believed that at a time when this opinion was no longer and not yet was again permissible, the peace and prosperity of Europe depended first and foremost on the establishment of good neighborly relations on the Rhine. Since they believed in a German victory, they endeavored to create an atmosphere during the war that forbade Germany from allowing France to be deprived of Versailles in peace.

The number of French collaborators who worked with Germany out of an inner inclination towards totalitarian and authoritarian state ideas was negligible. But here, too, the question arises as to whether it was an unforgivable crime to see German National Socialism as a protective barrier against Russian Bolshevism and, given the choice between hegemony in Moscow or Berlin, to prefer Berlin's hegemony. The circles of the French resistance movement that set the tone in the Algiers Committee and the "Provisional Government" had no reason to accuse the collaborators of totalitarian and authoritarian tendencies, as democracy had been restored in France with very few democratic methods.

The fact that all French newspapers that continued to appear under the German occupation were banned and in many cases confiscated; that only the eighty members of the old National Assembly who had voted against Petain were allowed to run for office, but not the more than five hundred who had voted for him; that one million French citizens lost their right to vote along with their civil rights: all this could not have been done better in a totalitarian and authoritarian state. Perhaps these measures and the bloody terror were necessary to help democracy win again in France - since the resistance movement, according to its own statements, only had 60,000 supporters in order to master the 100,000 collaborators. If the Resistance's seizure of power was a victory for democracy, the means used to achieve this victory and maintain its power were anything but democratic.

The incidents between the resistance movement and the collaborators not only raise questions about French domestic politics, but also about Europe as a whole in terms of foreign policy. There is much talk today of Europe: but the French, who were most devoted to this idea, are no longer among the living or, if they survived the liberation, have been eliminated from any influence in their country. The need for Franco-German

understanding is being spoken of again and more and more frequently: but the French champions and most loyal supporters of this idea are lying in the ground, languishing in dungeons, driven from their homes and farms, chased out of their professions and offices.

Rarely has such a large part of a population - one million people, including family members, even several million people - suffered so much in good and blood for the willingness to communicate with a neighboring country. For the German people, this has resulted in a deep

Obligation. Resistance feelings, resentment, justified and unjustified resentment against the occupying power will also have accumulated in it since the roles were reversed. The thought of the millions of French collaborators makes it the duty of the German people not to give in to these sentiments, to always keep in mind that there is also the greater "one" France alongside the "other". Much is possible with good will. There are already signs of a rapprochement between the French collaborators and the politically far-sighted, European-minded elements of the French resistance movement.

My war crimes trial

Both German and foreign international lawyers argue that the war crimes trials violate two fundamental legal concepts: the principle that laws must not have retroactive effect and the principle that no one can be a judge in his own cause.

As far as the first objection is concerned, I cannot agree with it in this case. In fact, I think that humanity has waited far too long to bring warmongers and war criminals to justice. In the Second World War, the atrocities were on such a scale that it was imperative for the guilty parties to account for them. However, it would have been more conducive to the great new idea of international jurisdiction if the dock had not been reserved exclusively for the vanquished and the bench not exclusively for the victors, and if it had become clearer that the war crimes laws of 1945 were intended to have a retrospective as well as a prospective effect.

I unreservedly agree with the second objection of the lawyers that no one should be a judge in their own cause. A breach of this principle is no less questionable in the international legal system than in the context of national jurisdiction. Instincts of hatred are too strong to allow objective legal judgments to be passed on nationals of enemy states. The French regulation on the prosecution of war criminals also stipulates that the judges must have belonged to the resistance movement. So the German defendants are judged by Frenchmen who are particularly biased against them and who tend to completely ignore the legal aspects of the cases presented to them.

Another peculiarity of the French exceptional courts for the prosecution of war criminals is that they judge according to the "Code penal", so the charges and punishments must always be assimilated to a paragraph of the French penal code. But the Penal Code has only one political paragraph, the paragraph on treason. Since my war crime had to be sought at the political level, I should therefore first be charged with treason. For this purpose, my file was handed over to the "Haute Cour de Justice" by the military court in the spring of 1947. In those years, several German nationals were actually sentenced by the French judiciary on the basis of the aforementioned paragraph, sometimes to severe sentences. In

In my case, however, the view prevailed that a German could not be prosecuted for treason against France. My file was therefore returned to the Paris military court six months later, and the prosecution felt compelled to look for other grounds. It was not an easy task, because apart from complicity in attempts to keep the peace and restore a reasonable peace, I had not committed any war crimes.

One of the jurors who sat in judgment of me in the Paris Palace of Justice in July 1949 asked me why, with such a clear political conscience, I had not voluntarily surrendered to the French authorities after the occupation of Germany. I replied to the juror - as General de Lattre de Tassigny's chief of staff, he had taken part in the invasion of the French army in Verantworth's place - that I would naturally have asked myself the same question at that time. At that time I was living with my wife and children in a small Black Forest cottage twenty kilometers above Baden-Baden and had intended to wait out the occupation quietly. At the last minute, however, I was visited by friends and urgently warned of the approaching French troops. I would have done well to heed this warning and change

residence with my family. We had barely set off when a French detachment, who obviously didn't want to pay me a protocol visit, arrived in the Black Forest valley. The farmer who kept the key to the cottage was maltreated by the commando, but the house itself was blown up with such a powerful dynamite charge that the roofs of farms far away were blown up.

As I had decided not to reveal my incognito on my own initiative, I had the opportunity for almost six months to gather personal impressions of the French occupation in Germany and to make comparisons with the German occupation in France. It was instructive for me to see many issues treated very differently and others as if in a mirror. In the interests of understanding between the two peoples, it is to be hoped that the French occupation will end as correctly as the German occupation began.

In the course of a few weeks, there were more rapes in small central and southern Baden than in the whole of France in four years. Some places were released for looting for a few hours by military leaders of the troops; prisoners of war who had already been released by the Anglo-Saxon armies were recaptured after their arrival home despite having been duly released and transported back to France. If German camps believed they had the right to treat political prisoners harshly, the French services made it their duty to do so. However, there was also a great deal of chivalrous behavior among the French officers and soldiers, especially

The North African troops generally showed a willingness to help the population and the prisoners that could put some whites to shame. With regard to the excesses of the French troops, it must be borne in mind that de Lattre de Tassigny's army had taken many young resistance fighters from the "Forces françaises de l'Intérieur" into their ranks on their march from Marseille to the Vosges, some of whom had personally experienced hardships at the hands of the Germans or wanted to avenge executions of comrades that had been presented to them as unlawful.

As on the French roads in June 1940, there were now, five years later, millions of refugees on the German roads. At the end of the Western campaign, the German armies had received orders to offer the evacuees empty seats in the army motor vehicles or, if they had their own cars, to supply them with troop fuel. The motor vehicles of the Allied armies were forbidden to take civilians with them, even though the rail network in Germany was no less destroyed in 1945 and had been out of service on many routes for longer than in France in 1940.

Fortunately, I had a pair of sturdy hiking boots that were to serve me well during this time. Even before the enemy occupation had reached southern Baden and Württemberg, I had found shelter for my family in a remote hamlet in the Lake Constance region, but as my presence could endanger them, I returned to the Black Forest myself, already under a different name, and hired myself out with a friend as a woodcutter in a small community in the upper Wiesental. There was still snow on the ground when our "two-man crew" set to work in a forest over 1000 meters high south of the Feldberg region. When our wristwatches began to go on strike during the unusual work, we made the dial of a sundial out of logs in a forest aisle in front of our hut. From time to time, a forest warden came up to instruct us in our work and also brought news from the surrounding valleys, which were gradually all occupied.

One night, shortly before dawn, there was a knock at the hut shutters. "Nothing left, the

French are coming. Someone told them there were two people up here who didn't belong." The friendly warner had walked three hours from his home village through the dark night and disappeared back into the forest. We had barely woken up when the light of headlights and the wheezing of truck engines in a ravine leading to the heights made the warning a reality. A quarter of an hour later - we had just had time to pack our rucksacks and get a few hundred meters away - machine guns were firing into the empty hut from all sides. At dawn, fresh snow fell, covering our tracks.

Months of restless wandering followed. Strangers and friends, fleeting acquaintances and employees of the embassy, several of whom had settled in the area. (The mountains after the collapse took it in turns to take me in. I was arrested twice, one time for just a few days, the other time for six weeks.

During the second arrest, French radio and the French press broke the news that "Ambassador Abetz had been taken prisoner in Vorarlberg". The comments that the camp guards made in response to the news showed me once again that not all French people were aware of my contribution to understanding between the two countries. I owe my release from the camp to my time at art school. The camp administration wanted to make their mess hall more picturesque. I volunteered for the task force formed for this purpose and decorated the walls with a few illustrations of French folk songs and scenes from old French history. Those who could not forgive me for switching from art to diplomacy would at least have forgiven me for giving up art in view of these works. However, my works were very well received by the guards, and after they were finished, the camp commander told me: "You may not be the person depicted on the photograph on your identification card, but the pictures you have taken are very beautiful. You are free."

In the meantime, it was the end of August. In September and early October, I spent a few weeks with my wife and children in the hamlet in the Lake Constance region, until the occupation reached this remote corner and the police there also expressed curiosity about my presence. When I arrived back in the Black Forest, several of my acquaintances had already been arrested by the French military police as "friends of Ambassador Abetz" in the hamlet that had been my last place of residence, as well as in the surrounding villages. Apparently, however, my identity had not yet been established. As the enlargement of my heart, which I had contracted in Berlin in 1943, was getting worse again, I went for medical treatment to a sanatorium a little further away, where I was arrested a few days later, on October 25, 1945, as "Ambassador Abetz".

The French military commander, General König, ordered me to be treated according to my rank. The military governorate in Constance, where I was initially taken, complied with this order with the utmost correctness and chivalry. However, I set off for Paris in handcuffs. In Paris, like all German prisoners on remand in France, whether ordinary soldiers or commanding generals, I was subjected to the regime of a common law criminal.

The "Cherche-Midi" military prison in Paris, which was to provide me with hospitality for four and a half years, is located in the middle of the French capital, just a few blocks from the German embassy. It is an old monastery and was only given a new purpose around 1800. The name "Cherche-Midi" comes from an earlier time when hungry people were given food at the helpful

The monastery inmates who were ready came to "look for their lunch". Especially during the first period of imprisonment, when no parcels were allowed for the German prisoners, some of them may have regretted that the old abbots or abbesses and their chefs were no longer in charge of the building.

Anyone who prefers the prison romance of past centuries with its musty dungeons, thick, damp walls, unheated rooms and nocturnal fauna to the impersonal atmosphere of hygienic and spacious modern prisons was in for a treat at the Cherche-Midi military prison in Paris. The windows were bricked up to just below the ceiling and fitted with iron boxes on the outside and inside to protect the inmates from unhealthy draughts of fresh air. Even during the day, the rooms lay in that mysterious semi-darkness which is the poetry of old master paintings and which only brightens up enough on very bright summer days to invite you to read and write. The intimacy of the cells was given by their proportions - 2.40 by 1.50 meters. The furnishings - a straw sack lying on the floor, a tiny chained table with a stool, a wash bowl, water jug and toilet bucket - were well suited to these proportions.

For the first three and a half years, I was completely isolated; I had no right to speak to anyone in prison and even took my daily half-hour walks alone in the narrow, unadorned prison yard. In the eye of the cell door, attentive guards checked on my well-being every five minutes. They were also always very willing to give me a light - smoking was allowed, but matches were forbidden - and the prison staff were generally not unfriendly, with a few exceptions. In view of the inadequate daylight, I found it a great concession that light was provided in my cell during sleeping hours - albeit for reasons of surveillance - so that I could postpone my reading and writing until then; and as I had already enjoyed being a night worker at the embassy, I did not change my habits too much in this respect.

The contemplative life, which in many ways resembled that of the former monks of the Cherche-Midi, could have had its charms had it not been for the burning homesickness for my wife and children and the agonizing worry about my financial situation. So I was glad when, after almost four years in custody, I was handed the indictment and the trial began on July 10, 1949. The proceedings took place in a chambre correctionnelle of the Palais de Justice, which proved to be far too small due to the large number of journalists and members of the public, and in which the heat of the day in Paris - 40° in the shade - was particularly unpleasant. Maitre Floriot, the official defense counsel provided to me, had tried to get a larger room, but had not succeeded in his request. Since As the trial lasted twelve days and the cells of the Cherche-Midi are as much lead chambers in summer as they are ice chambers in winter, I found no refreshment from the heat of the day, even at night. It was not easy to hold debates in front of a foreign court in a foreign language under such circumstances after almost four years of complete isolation from the outside world.

The indictment ran to almost two hundred pages, and it is quicker to say what I was not charged with than to list the points on which I was indicted.

I was not charged with a "crime against peace", although the prosecutor expressed the opinion that I had engaged in "war-mongering" with my attempts to persuade France to take military action against its liberators. "Among the Germans," the indictment began, "who were responsible for the occupation of France from June 1940 to the summer of

1944, no one served Hitler's plans better than Otto Abetz. He accomplished his task of keeping defeated France in the political line imposed on it by its victor with complete success." It had seemed to me that the most characteristic feature of Hitler's "plans" for France was their lack of planning and that the only identifiable feature of the Reich government's "political line" during the occupation was its complete absence.

I was also not charged with espionage and illegal activities in the sense of the "Fifth Column" during the pre-war period. The public prosecutor tried to cast a shadow of suspicion over this issue as well. To this end, he had called in a political informer from Lyon, who claimed that I had held a secret meeting in this city in April 1939 and declared that the Reich would extend its "living space" to the entire left bank of the Rhone, including Marseilles. The overzealous "prosecution witness" then had to admit, however, that my lecture had not been held before the "Fifth Column" but before members of the Lyon "Comite France-Allemagne" and in a public restaurant. The words put into my mouth - had they been true - could at best have served the enemies of Germany, but could hardly have promoted the idea of Franco-German understanding.

First and foremost among the charges was "plunder". I was accused of having extorted the transfer of French shares in a copper mine in Yugoslavia from the French government by abusing the power of the victorious power. The copper yield from these mines was urgently needed for German aircraft construction, but benefited the Royal Air Force. As the Armistice Commission in Wiesbaden had failed to get through to the French government with its demand for the transfer of the shares, Göring had asked me in November 1940 to try to arrange the transaction by political means. I immediately obtained the agreement of the French government when I explained to them that France could find much more substantial compensation in other areas. It was therefore a free French decision, and the shareholders were compensated many times over. of the value of the shares given to Göring. Under Tito, they would have been expropriated without any compensation.

I was accused of having abused the power of the victorious power to force German capital into a French press agency and a French printing company. It turned out, however, that in the case of the press agency, the desire for a German equity stake had come from the French side and in the case of the distribution agency, a transfer of shares into German hands had never taken place at all.

I was charged with aiding and abetting the looting of Jewish furniture in the southern zone. However, the charge was unfounded, as no Jewish furniture had ever been confiscated in the southern zone by either German or French authorities.

After all, I was also accused of looting French public and private art collections. In the first weeks of the occupation, the embassy had indeed been given the task of securing the evacuated museum collections and the private, primarily Jewish, art collections endangered by the absence of their owners, as well as preparing the repatriation of works of art illegally exported from the Reich. In August and September 1940, these tasks were transferred to other German agencies. All instructions were to the effect that these seizures did not constitute expropriations. The measures were intended to protect the works of art during the armistice, but some of the seized works of art were to be used as collateral for the peace negotiations. Works of art claimed under the peace treaty were to

be allocated to German museums and German ministries to furnish their official buildings, and the Federal Foreign Office and its missions abroad were also to be given some representative works.

I reported to the Reich government that the security of the public collections was sufficiently guaranteed by the French authorities and that it was therefore unnecessary to take them under German protection. France is in fact the only country occupied during and after the Second World War in which the museum collections remained untouched.

In isolated cases, the embassy seized private collections; there is documentary evidence that these were not exclusively Jewish art collections.

I testified in court that I regarded the claim to French works of art in the peace treaty as plunder, because I had also seen plunder in the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. As is well known, the Treaty of Versailles had forced Germany to hand over works of art which, like the wings of the Ghent Altarpiece by the van Eyck brothers in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, had not been taken away during the war but had been acquired on a purely commercial basis during the peace. Furthermore, the Treaty of Versailles, together with all private German property in the Allied and associated countries, had also taken a number of extraordinarily valuable German works of art.

art collections had been expropriated; my defense was able to present a catalog proving that one of these collections alone had contained thirty Renoirs. The Reich government, I continued, could therefore rely on a precedent when it claimed French works of art in the peace treaty. However, since I had also been of the opinion in this case that Versailles had been too bad a peace treaty to merit imitation, I had endeavored to obtain a different orientation from the responsible German authorities.

I proved my corresponding interventions on the basis of documents. In the spring of 1941, I had suggested that the entire seizure and administration of Jewish art possessions be transferred to a French government institution. In the summer of the same year, I proposed that the seized works of art be appraised by a Franco-German commission of experts and expropriated not for the benefit of the Reich, but for the benefit of the French war victims. In the fall of 1941, following a protest by the French government, I suggested to the responsible department of the military commander that it establish a legal basis for the measures taken.

These attempts were all unsuccessful. In the spring of 1942, Hitler ordered that the seized works of art be transferred to the Reich Chancellery depot. He reserved the right to decide personally on their subsequent use. He is said to have remarked: "Works of art are the traveling prizes of victorious nations." That he was not alone in this view is shown by the gaps in today's halls and depots of German museums and, in addition to the Treaty of Versailles already mentioned, the actions of the French revolutionary armies and the Napoleonic armies. My defense was able to present very extensive and informative material on both these recent and historical events.

In the indictment, the offenses against "goods" with which I was charged were followed by the offenses against "persons" with which I was charged. The French legal term for this is "action sur les personnes". The public prosecutor believed that my interventions in this area should be called "action contre les personnes". In reality, they deserved to be called "action pour les personnes".

The prosecution wanted to hold me responsible for the treatment of the Jewish

question, the protective custody measures, the taking of reprisals and the forced recruitment of workers, although the embassy - as is self-evident in a military-occupied country - had no executive power. It had only been allowed to give political advice; therefore, it should only have been possible to judge whether my advice had contributed to the intensification or moderation of the incriminated measures.

On the Jewish question, I had advocated that legislation and the implementation of anti-Semitic measures should be the exclusive responsibility of the French government, as this was the only way to prevent interference from extremist Berlin party offices. I had not succeeded with my proposals; the Reichssicherheitshauptamt had appointed a special commissioner for Jewish affairs with direct powers. However, my defense proved that my opinion was correct. Where the anti-Semitic measures had been in the hands of French authorities, thousands of Jews were able to slip through the cracks. The Jewish star, for example, was never introduced in the southern zone, even after its occupation, despite the strongest German pressure on the French government.

Furthermore, as the documents show, my efforts were aimed at exempting Jews of French nationality from the anti-Semitic measures. These attempts were not based on any hostility towards Jews of foreign nationality. Rather, they were based on the fact that the embassy had no jurisdiction over French Jews, but could officially intervene on behalf of foreign Jews due to the protests of their diplomatic and consular representatives. The Foreign Office had instructed the embassy that only American Jews were to be exempted from the anti-Semitic measures; the "arrests of Jews who were European nationals were not to cause any diplomatic entanglements". Overriding this instruction, the embassy also lobbied the military commander for the exemption of European Jews. My defense was even able to present lists of Jews freed by me from internment camps in countries whose diplomatic missions had not intervened on behalf of their Jewish citizens or which - like some of the Baltic countries - no longer had diplomatic missions in France due to the circumstances of the war.

Numerous French and German witnesses, including Jewish witnesses, confirmed that the embassy had intervened in countless individual cases on behalf of persecuted Jews and that I personally had never been an anti-Semite. In the spring of 1949, a trial against the director of the German Cultural Institute had taken place in Paris. It came to light that this institute had kept numerous works by Jewish authors in its library with my consent. In 1942, a French author had published a roll of honor of great Frenchmen. In order to avoid a ban by Goebbels' censors, he presented me with the galley proofs and I gave him my approval. Several pages of this publication were dedicated to Jewish thinkers and artists. The section dedicated to Emile Zola contained a facsimile of the article "J'accuse", which had appeared as a beacon in the Dreyfus affair. Incidentally, Captain Dreyfus had also spent his pre-trial detention in the Cherche-Midi military prison in Paris.

In the matter of political arrests and protective measures, too, I always tried to moderate the harsh orders from Berlin as far as possible. The cases in which the embassy intervened in favor of political prisoners, were in the thousands. When the embassy became aware of serious acts of sabotage, espionage and other illegal activities that endangered the security of the occupying forces, it naturally had to demand the arrest of the Täter; but if any mitigating circumstances could be invoked or the guilt could not be proven beyond doubt, I always argued for their

release.

In the only case in which the Embassy itself was involved in an arrest operation, namely the aforementioned drawing up of lists for the arrest of two thousand leading personalities, I did not carry out the order, although such preventive arrest measures are usually taken by all civilian and military governments of all countries and regimes in the event of internal unrest or external threats. Of the two thousand persons registered under my responsibility, only two have been arrested; but even in these two cases, they were not preventive arrests, but arrests for proven acts of resistance.

One of these two people, General de la Porte du Theil, who was called as a witness against me, stated in court that he had been arrested for no reason. However, when questioned by my defense about his activities, he stated that, as head of the youth work camps of the "Chantiers de jeunesse", he had set up rolls of tribe, given military training to several hundred thousand young Frenchmen, equipped some of them and was in a position to throw forty divisions into battle - against the German occupying forces - from one hour to the next. It was therefore difficult to speak of an "unfounded" and "arbitrary" arrest in this case. When asked by the president whether he had been treated correctly in German custody, the general replied with an unequivocal yes. He could even have added that he had been accommodated as a "noble prisoner" at Itter Castle in Tyrol with diplomatic rations and great personal comforts, although according to international law he would have forfeited his life through his resistance activities. Despite the testimony given personally by General de la Porte du Theil on the witness stand, the Paris military court convicted me for the "unlawful" arrest of this general and for "physical abuse and torture" allegedly inflicted on him during his imprisonment.

No less typical of the conduct of my trial was the handling of the issue of hostage shootings. To my great surprise, and certainly to the surprise of all those who knew my attitude to these measures, I was also charged in this matter. The fact that reprisals of this kind correspond to a general wartime custom, but that I had spoken out against them from the outset, was not taken into consideration, nor was the letter of thanks from a French city council for fifty citizens saved from being shot as hostages by the embassy, or documents about other successful interventions by the embassy in this area. President Nliilzic based the indictment on the two introductory sentences of a seven-page tele-

gramme, although he did not even read the second sentence to the end. The telegram - it was dated October 25, 1941 and had the subject "Assassination attempts against German Wehrmacht choirs" - began as follows:

"Following the instructions received from the Reich Foreign Minister, I exercised complete restraint in the matter of reprisals for the assassinations of members of the Wehrmacht and took the view that this was an exclusively military matter. Furthermore, I expressed the view to the military authorities that the reprisals ordered were entirely appropriate if . . ."

At this comma and before this "if", the President interrupted the reading of the telegram to turn to a new question, so that the impression must have arisen that I found the "ordered reprisals quite appropriate".

My defense attorney insisted on reading the entire telegram and personally took it upon himself to read the following six pages of "ifs" and the conclusion of the telegram.

"In my opinion, it is of decisive importance in assassinations whether they correspond to a hostile mood of the population or are carried out with the provocative intention of provoking such a mood. In the present case, it can be regarded as established that the mood of the French population did not provide a precondition for these assassination attempts against members of the German armed forces.

The French public unanimously condemned the murders and the insidious way in which they were carried out. However, if the remaining hundred hostages are shot, there is a danger that the public's indignation at the assassinations will turn into indignation at the reprisals, which are disproportionately high by local standards. In this situation, it would seem politically useful to me to make an urgent appeal to the population to inform them that the Führer has decided to suspend the shooting of the remaining hundred hostages until further notice, in view of the willingness he has now shown to assist in the investigation of the perpetrators."

"This pardon," added my defense counsel, "has been granted. Could the French cause have been pleaded more skillfully? And yet the prosecution accuses Abetz of this telegram."

Another case in which I saved over a hundred French lives without harming anyone was also counted by the prosecution not as a merit but as a crime. It was the affair of the "Gardes civiques". During the Western Campaign, the then Prime Minister Paul Reynaud and the Minister of the Interior Georges Mandel had ordered both the army and the "Gardes civiques", who had been called upon to provide security services in the hinterland, to kill German paratroopers who had jumped off on the spot - "fusilier sans merci" can be read verbatim in one of the orders that was found - because the members of this troop were wearing civilian disguises and Dutch

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uniforms would be dropped. On the basis of these instructions, over thirty German paratroopers and German airmen forced to make an emergency landing, who wore the uniforms of their units known to all foreign military attachés, were murdered and numerous others severely maltreated. After the occupation of France, about one hundred and twenty "Gardes civiques" involved in the murders were identified and brought before German military tribunals. The first two executions had already been carried out. The families of the "Gardes civiques" asked the embassy to save their sons, fathers and brothers from execution, as they had only been carrying out orders. I suggested to the

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imperial government that the ministers responsible for the orders should be shot, not the "Gardes civiques" who carried them out. When I made this suggestion, I knew full well that it would not be carried out. Although one human life is worth as much as another, the execution of a hundred little people would not have caused a stir; but Berlin had to shrink from the execution of international personalities. My calculation was correct. The imperial government pardoned the "Gardes civiques" sentenced to death without demanding the execution of the French ministers. The French government was only asked to intern them permanently. This did not worsen their lot, as they had already been interned by the French government several months earlier without any German intervention.

In the spring of 1944, I made use of the same technique when Ribbentrop instructed me to arrange for the execution of French resistance supporters as a reprisal for the executions of Tunis fighters loyal to Vichy by the Algiers Committee. I made the counter-proposal of targeting internationally known personalities such as Leon Blum, Paul Reynaud and Georges Mandel for reprisals instead of insignificant supporters of the resistance movement, who would not impress the Algiers Committee at all. This time I knew full well that the French government would never go for it. Laval had the proposal forwarded to the Algiers Committee via Madrid, and Admiral Derrien, the commander of the naval base at Bizerta, who had been sentenced to death, was pardoned; but there is documentary evidence that Laval indignantly rejected my proposal and would never have followed it in practice. The executions that had begun as a reprisal for the executions of Tunisian fighters, to which six French resistance supporters had already fallen victim and which were to be followed by hundreds more, were not continued after my proposal to the Imperial Government. My defense was able to prove that my proposal had nothing to do with the return transport and the murder of Mandel, of which I was completely unaware, and that it was even contrary to these events, with evidence that finally convinced even the public prosecutor; if my proposal had been meant seriously and had been accepted by the French government, Mandel would not have been able to exert pressure in favor of the Tunisian fighters dead, but only alive. His assassination could not prevent the executions of the French loyal to Vichy in Algiers, but could only result in new acts of violence against them.

However one may judge the "Gardes civiques" and the "Tunis fighters" from a national point of view: under international law, the former were franc-tireurs, the latter supporters of a legal government. The shooting of the "Gardes civiques" involved in the killing of the German paratroopers and airmen would therefore have been just as justifiable as the taking of reprisals for the execution of the Tunis fighters by the Algiers Committee. When I wanted to prevent and prevented the shooting of hundreds of Frenchmen in one case as in the other, I proceeded, as with the hostage question, not so much from legal as from human and political considerations. Even in wars, bloodshed must be avoided as far as humanly possible. Nations tend to forgive each other for their fallen soldiers, but the blood of even justly executed civilians always stands between them for a long time to come.

After my opposition to the Sauckel measures could also be clearly proven, all the charges brought against me were invalidated. It was certain that I had not committed offenses against French "goods" and "persons", but on the contrary had protected French "goods" and "persons" to the greatest possible extent from interference and danger. "The indictment," wrote a Parisian journalist, "thought it had built impregnable fortresses. But the storm of debates has undermined them, the weather storms have undermined them.

Everything has collapsed. But one section of the wall is still standing. The whole thing looks like the ruined, dusky backdrop of a battlefield. The prosecutor can walk around in the rubble of his building, number the ruins and rebuild the collapsed positions. He can even cling desperately to some foothold. But what will the judges do?"

Certainly not all the judges were communists, but the most implacable jurors one could find among the old fighters of the resistance movement and a communist, a major in the Paris fire department regiment, had the last word among them. The first week of the trial coincided with the French national holiday, July 14. On a parade organized by the Communist Party on that day, a poster was carried which demanded my head. All the jurors agreed with the public prosecutor and the president that the German ambassador during the occupation should not be acquitted under any circumstances. They were not swayed in this decision by the fact that the prosecution witnesses called were almost without exception exonerated. "The least hostile of our enemies," said one of them. "Abetz demanded that I be executed," explained the leader of one of the most important national resistance organizations, whose appearance the court had expected to be particularly successful, "but I was a franc-tireur and fought him. I do not wish him ill for that. But who I do want to offend is this trial, this . . ." The president interrupted him in mid-word: "You are not invited to say anything about this question."

Others also saw themselves replaced on the witness stand when they sided with me too passionately, especially an old front-line fighter and vice-president of the "Comite France-Allemagne" who, despite the risk associated with his appearance, had spontaneously come into the courtroom to vouch for the sincerity of my efforts to reach an understanding. Among the German witnesses, Professor Grimm gave the same confirmation of my activities during the war, which he had followed and supported as legal advisor to the embassy during occasional visits to France. General von Choltitz testified that I had assisted him as commander of Greater Paris in the last days of the occupation in his attempts to save the city from unnecessary destruction. After his testimony, there was an attentive silence in the courtroom, through whose half-opened windows the muffled sounds of car traffic on the Seine bridges penetrated.

According to French court rules, the defense attorney has the last word, and the defendant is free to say a few words before the plea. A Frenchman who had been in the ranks of the resistance movement during the occupation, but who today is a supporter of Franco-German understanding, advised me to explain that I was in favor of this idea in the future as I had been in the past. I replied that nothing had changed and nothing could change in my conviction of the necessity of good neighborly relations and in my friendship with France. But I was unable to make such a statement in this context. He understood me.

I limited myself to a declaration of loyalty to Germany. I explained that I had always been loyal to the government to which I had sworn my oath as a civil servant, and if I did not carry out instructions I had received, it was only because I believed that this would better protect German interests.

The plea lasted seven hours. Maitre Floriot, one of the greatest lawyers in the Paris chamber, was close to physical exhaustion at times. His defense speech was a legal and rhetorical masterpiece.

The court retired for an hour and a half to deliberate. It had to rule on sixty-four charges in those ninety minutes.

When the sentence of twenty years' hard labor was announced, there was a murmur of disapproval in the courtroom despite the large police presence. The judges hurriedly made their way through the crowd that filled the anteroom and the hall.

But Parisian newspapers wrote that I smiled when the verdict was announced.

Paris military prison Cherche-Midi, Fresnes prison spring - summer
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